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The History and Romance of Crime

FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES
TO THE PRESENT DAY



THE GROLIER SOCIETY
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Young Girl

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Young Girl Revolutionist Condemned to the Scaffold

So severe was the Russian government in the measures adopted to repress the revolutionists that mere school-girls were exiled, imprisoned or executed. Many well-born girls made it their chief aim to help the peasants, enduring the privations and hardships of the labouring classes. Madame Vera Phillipova, a young woman of great beauty, was long the most popular person in the revolutionary movement. She became identified with the conspiracy of "the Fourteen," and was thrown into the Schlüsselburg for the term of her natural life.

THE

Russian Prisons

ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL
THE SCHLÜSSELBURG
THE OSTROG AT OMSK
THE STORY OF SIBERIAN EXILE
TIUMEN, TOMSK, SAGHALIEN

by

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Late Inspector of Prisons in Great Britain

Author of

"The Mysteries of Police and Crime"

"Fifty Years of Public Service," etc.



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INTRODUCTION

THE huge empire founded by the Czars of Russia in the latter half of the sixteenth century was based upon absolute autocracy. The Czar by virtue of his divine origin exercised absolute authority over the many diverse elements consolidated under his sovereign will. From the earliest times no idea of personal liberty was tolerated; the slightest expression of independence in thought and action was peremptorily forbidden. The attitude of the government has ever been uncompromisingly severe toward all malcontents, and Russian history for the last two centuries is one long record of conspiracy constantly afoot, and constantly repressed by savagely cruel coercion. Imprisonment, the absolute loss of physical freedom, has taken a wider meaning in Russia than in other countries, for it is the lot in one form or another of two classes of offenders: the ordinary criminal under a civil code, from which capital punishment is now excluded, and the political dissidents deemed criminal by the arbitrary government of the land and deserving of exemplary and vindictive punishment. Russian prisons are in some respects the worst and most horrible the world has seen, and they are more especially repreh-

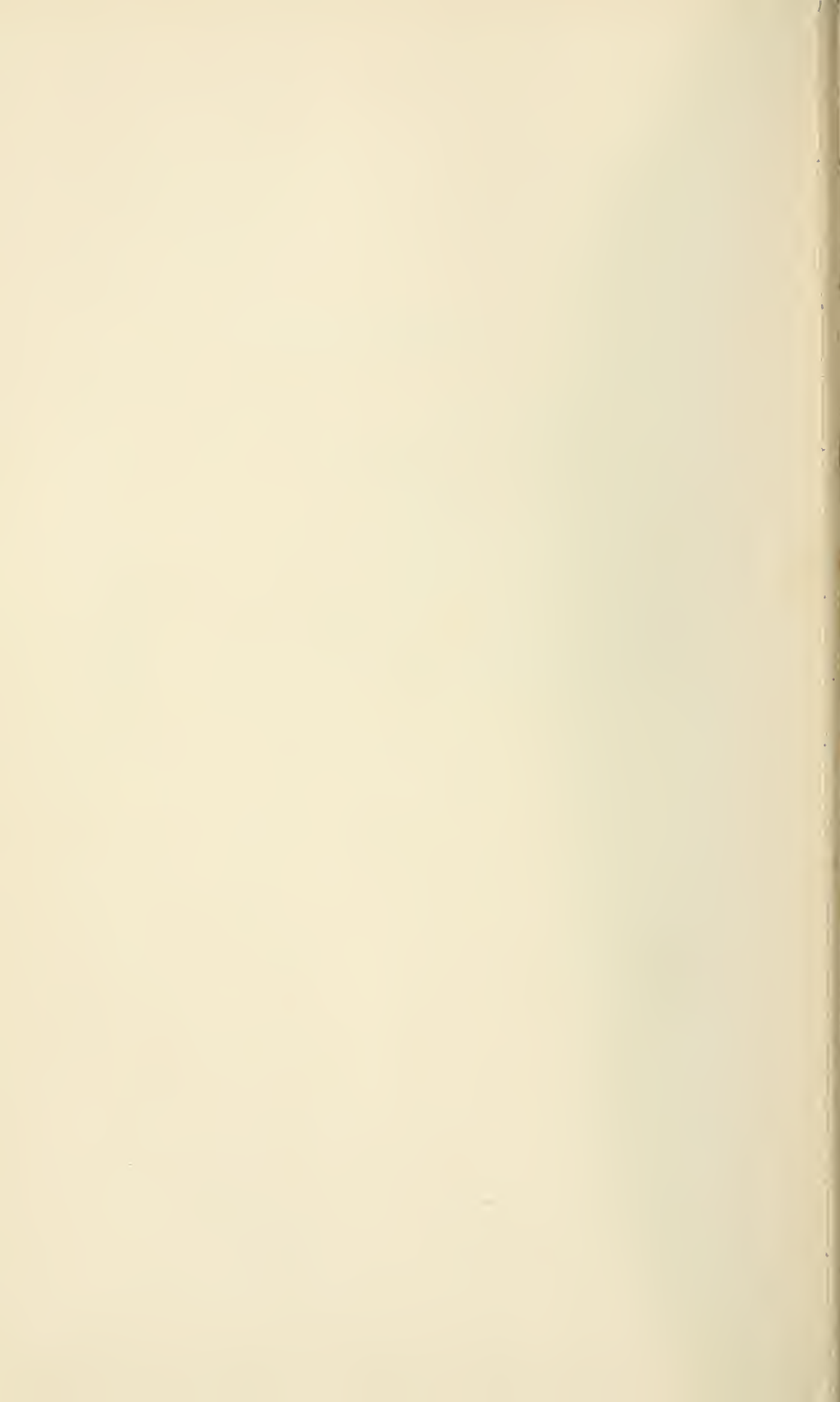
sible in these latter days when humane considerations are allowed weight in the administration of penal institutions.

In giving a description of Russian prisons as they have been and to some extent still remain, it is fair to state that the facts are authenticated by unimpeachable evidence. We have the statements of eye-witnesses speaking from their own knowledge, and these unsparing critics have not always been foreigners and outsiders; Russians themselves have also raised their indignant voices in energetic protest, and official reports can be quoted to substantiate many of the charges. On the other hand, Russian methods have found champions and apologists among travellers, who were, perhaps, superficial observers, easily misled, and their accounts cannot in the least upset the conclusions arrived at by more thoroughgoing and disinterested investigators. Such men as George Kennan, indefatigable, honest, courageous and of the highest veracity, have framed an indictment from which there is no appeal. The facts have been vouched for, moreover, by the trustworthy narratives of those who have themselves been personal victims of the worst horrors inflicted, and buttressed by confidential reports from great Russian functionaries sent direct to the Czar. Secret despatches which have fallen into hands for which they were not intended, and have been made public by the searchers for truth, frankly admit the justice of the sentence

passed upon at least one frightful portion of Russian penal institutions, — the system of exile to Eastern Siberia. Governor-General Anuchin twice addressed the Czar Alexander III, in 1880 and 1882, after long tours of personal inspection, in such condemnatory terms that the mighty ruler upon whom the terrible burden of responsibility rested, was moved to endorse the report in his own handwriting with the words, "It is inexcusable, even criminal, to allow such a state of affairs in Siberia to continue." The frightful system which allowed an irresponsible bureaucracy to sentence untried persons to exile by so-called "administrative process" is fully explained and described in the present volume.

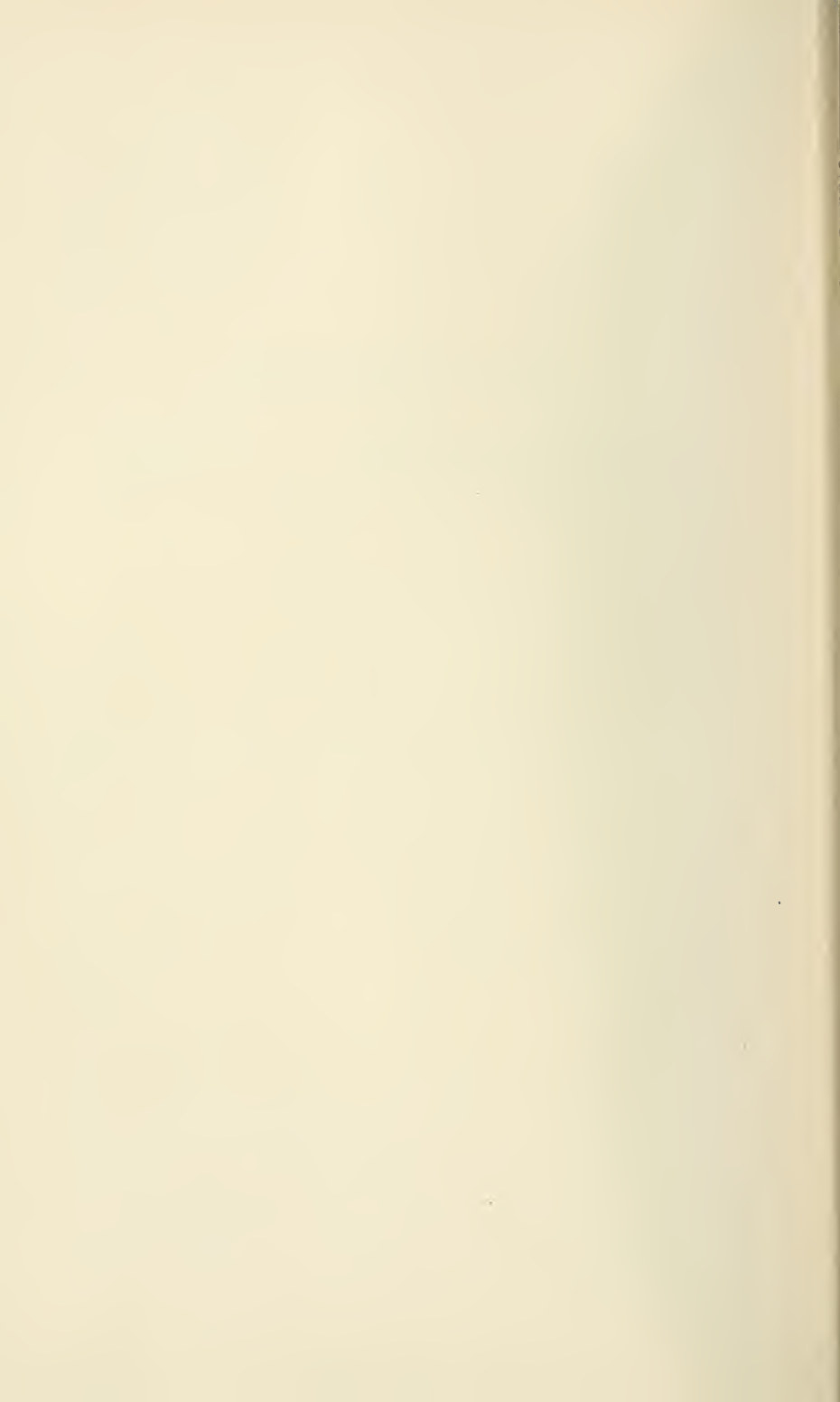
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RUSSIAN PRISONS

CHAPTER I

GENERAL SURVEY

Commencement of judicial reform in Russia—Abandonment of knout and branding iron—The plet—Two classes of prisons, the “lock-up” and the “central” or convict prisons—Experiences of a woman exiled from Russia—Testimony of Carl Joubert—The state of the central prisons—The “model” prison in St. Petersburg—Punishments inflicted—The food in different prisons—Attempted escapes—Myshkin—His early history and daring exploits—Failure of his plan to rescue Chernyshevski from Siberia—His escape, recapture, and sentence of death—The prisoner Medvediev.

A DEFINITE movement toward judicial reform began in Russia in the early sixties. The old law courts with their archaic procedure and evil reputation as sinks of bribery and corruption were abolished. Trial by jury was revived, and justices of the peace were established to dispose of the smaller criminal offences. Shortly afterward, two of the most disgraceful features in the Russian penal code, the knout and the branding iron, disappeared. The punishment of splitting the nostrils to mark ineffaceably the prisoners exiled to the salt mines of

Okhotsk also ceased, and the simple Chinese no longer were surprised with the sight of a hitherto unknown race of men with peculiar features of their own. The knout, however, had long served its devilish purpose. It was inflicted even upon women in the time of Peter the Great, and was still remembered as an instrument which would surely kill at the thirtieth stroke, although in the hands of a skilful performer a single blow might prove fatal.

Flogging did not go entirely out of practice and might still be ordered by peasant courts, in the army and in the convict prisons. But another brutal whip survived; the plet is still used in the far-off penal settlements, although rarely, and only upon the most hardened offenders. It is composed of a thong of twisted hide about two feet in length, ending in a number of thin lashes, each a foot long, with small leaden balls attached, and forms a most severe and murderous weapon. The number of strokes inflicted may vary from twenty-three to fifty and at Saghalien in some cases reaches ninety-nine. If the victim has money or friends, the flogger is bribed to lay on heavily; for when the blow is so light as to fail to draw blood, the pain is greater. By beginning gently the flagellator can gradually increase the force of each blow until the whole back is covered with long swollen transverse welts which not uncommonly mortify, causing death.

At one time trial by court-martial could sentence a soldier to the frightful ordeal of the "rods," flog-

ging administered by comrades standing in two ranks between which he moved at a deliberate pace while they "laid on" the strokes with sticks upon his bare back. This is exactly the same penalty as that of "running the gauntlet," or "gantlope," well known in old-time military practice, and sometimes called "Green Street" in Russia, for the rods used were not always stripped of their leaves. The infliction might be greatly prolonged and the number of strokes given sometimes amounted to several thousand. Devilish ingenuity has now replaced the physical torture of knout and plet by a modern device for inflicting bodily discomfort, nothing less than riveting a wheel-barrow to a man's legs, which he must take with him everywhere, even to bed, — the apology for a bed on which he passed the night.

Russian prisons are of several classes. There are first the "lock-ups," or places of detention for the accused awaiting trial, scattered throughout the country, and quite unequal in the aggregate to the accommodation of the number of prisoners on hand. It has been estimated that to lodge all adequately, half as many more than the existing prisons would be required. Those of another class, the houses of correction, the hard labour or "central" prisons where compulsory labour is exacted, are very much like the "public works" convict prisons in the English system. Many of these are established in European Russia; more are to be found in Western

Siberia, and, on somewhat different lines, in the penal settlements of Eastern Siberia.

In the provincial "lock-ups" or *ostrogs* the conditions have always been deplorable. They are horribly overcrowded with wretched, hopeless beings for whom trial is often greatly delayed, and who lie there in inconceivable discomfort at the mercy of brutal and extortionate gaolers, "packed like herrings in a cask, in rooms of inconceivable foulness, in an atmosphere that sickens even to insensibility any one entering from the open air," says one writer.

The same author gives the experiences of a lady who was expelled from Russia for opening a school for peasants' children, and who was transferred to the Prussian frontier from prison to prison. "At Wilna," she says, "we were taken to the town prison, and detained for two hours late at night in an open yard under a drenching rain. At last we were pushed into a dark corridor and counted. Two soldiers laid hold of me and insulted me shamefully. After many oaths and much foul language, the fire was lighted and I found myself in a spacious room, in which it was impossible to take a step in any direction without treading on the women sleeping on the floor. Two women who occupied a bed took pity on me and invited me to share it with them. . . . The next night we were turned out from the prison and paraded in the yard for the start under a heavy rain. I do not know

how I happened to escape the fists of the gaolers, as the prisoners did not understand the evolutions and performed them under a storm of blows and curses; those who protested were put in irons and sent so to the train, although the law prescribes that in the cellular wagons no prisoner shall be chained.

“ Arrived at Kovno, we spent the whole day in going from one police station to another. In the evening we were taken to the prison for women where the superintendent was railing against the head gaoler and swearing that she would give him ‘bloody teeth.’ The prisoners told me that she often kept promises of this sort. Here I spent a week among murderesses and thieves and women arrested by mistake. Misfortune unites the unfortunate, and everybody tried to make life more tolerable for the rest; all were very kind to me and did their best to console me. On the previous day I had eaten nothing, for prisoners receive no food on the day they are brought to prison. I fainted from hunger, and the prisoners brought me round by giving me some of their black bread; there was a female inspector, but she did nothing but shout out shameless oaths such as no drunken man would use.

“ After a week’s halt at Kovno, I was sent on to the next town. After three days’ march we came to Mariampol. My feet were wounded and my stockings full of blood. The soldiers advised me

to ask for a vehicle, but I preferred physical suffering to the continued cursing and foul language of the chiefs. I was taken before the commander, who remarked that as I had walked for three days I could very well manage a fourth. On arrival at Volkovisk, the last halt, we were lodged provisionally in the prison, but the female side was in ruins and we were taken to the men's quarters, and had nowhere to sit but on the filthily dirty and foul-smelling floor. Here I spent two days and nights, passing the whole time at the window. In the night, the door was constantly thrown open for new arrivals; they also brought in a male lunatic who was perfectly naked. The miserable prisoners delighted in this, and tormented the maniac into a paroxysm of passion, until at last he fell on the floor in a fit and lay there foaming at the mouth. On the third day a soldier of the depot, a Jew, took me into his room, a tiny cell, where I stayed with his wife.

“The prisoners told me that many of them were detained by mistake for seven or eight months, awaiting their papers before being sent across the frontier. It is easy to imagine their condition after a seven months' stay in this sewer without a change of linen. . . . I had been six weeks on the road and was still delayed, but I got leave to send a registered letter to St. Petersburg, where I had influential friends, and a telegram came to send me on to Prussia immediately. My papers were soon

found, and I was sent to Eydtkuhnen, where I was set at liberty."

It is asserted by our author that this horrible picture was not one whit overcharged. "To Russians every word rings true and every scene looks normal. Oaths, filth, brutality, bribery, blows, hunger, are the essentials of every *ostrog* and of every depot from Kovno to Kamtchatka, from Archangel to Erzerum." It is summed up by Kropotkin as follows: "The incredible duration of preliminary detention, the disgusting circumstances of daily life; the congregation of hundreds of prisoners into small dirty chambers; the flagrant immorality of a corps of jailers who are practically omnipotent, whose whole function is to terrorise and oppress; the want of labour and the total absence of all that contributes to the moral welfare of man; the cynical contempt for human dignity and the physical degradation of prisoners — these are the elements of prison life in Russia."

Another writer of more recent date, Carl Joubert, whose works on Russia have been widely read, says, "I am aware that in no part of the world is the lot of a prisoner a happy one. It is not intended that it should be; but in civilised countries they are, at least, given the opportunity of keeping themselves clean and decent. They are treated as human beings and their health is considered; but in Russia it is different. The prisoners in Russia, whether before or after the trial — and a great

many of the political prisoners have no trial — the Russian prisoners are considered beasts, and treated accordingly. The warders know what is expected of them; and if a warder shows any glimmering of humanity in his treatment of the prisoners committed to his charge, his services are dispensed with and a stronger-hearted warder takes his place.

“I said that Russian prisoners have no sex; but I must qualify that statement. In so far as the normal treatment of the women is concerned, they are separated from the men, but no other distinction is made. If they are young and attractive, however, their sex can procure for them, and worse still, for those who are dear to them, a certain amount of consideration from those in authority over them on the road to Siberia.”

The penalties inflicted by the Russian code may be classed under four heads. The first is hard labour with the loss of civil rights, so that the convict's property passes to his heirs; he is dead in law, and his wife may marry another; he endures his term either after deportation to Siberia, or in one of the “central prisons” which have been built on purpose in European Russia, and where he spends a third or fourth of his entire sentence, until he goes finally to Siberia or Saghalien as a penal colonist. These central prisons were created to substitute a more regular and more severe treatment than was possible at a distance from home, and the aim was achieved. According to the best

authorities, the central prisons are practically "hells upon earth." "The horrors of hard labour in Siberia," says Peter Kropotkin, "have paled before them, and all those who have had experience of them are unanimous in declaring that the day a prisoner starts for Siberia is the happiest in his life."

A few specific details may be quoted about one or two of these prisons. In that of Kharkov, in Little Russia, at one time two hundred of the five hundred inmates died of scurvy in the course of four months. In the Byelogorod prison, nearly half of a total of three hundred and thirty prisoners died within a year, and forty-five more in the following six months. At Kiev the scourge of typhus was endemic. In one month in the year 1881 the deaths were counted by hundreds and the places of those who died were promptly filled by others similarly doomed. All the rooms occupied were very damp, the walls sweating with moisture, the floor rotten in many places, the cesspools overflowing and the neighbouring ground saturated. The epidemics were officially explained and the causes acknowledged by the chief board of prisons. It was urged that although the prison was dreadfully overcrowded, there was plenty of room elsewhere.

The chief prison in St. Petersburg at one time was the Litovski Zamok, and it was credited with being kept clean, but the buildings, old-fashioned, dark and damp, were only fit to be levelled to the

ground. A newer prison is the House of Preliminary Detention which is ambitiously designated as the "model," and which was built on the plan of modern prisons in Belgium and at an immense cost. Kropotkin characterises it as the only clean gaol for ordinary prisoners in Russia. Cleanliness in it amounts to a craze; the scrubbing brush is never idle; broom and pail are used with demoniacal activity. Particles of asphalt dust from the floor continually load the atmosphere and make breathing difficult. The three upper stories are infected by the exhalations from the lower, and the ventilation is so abominably bad that at night when the doors are shut the interior of the cells is suffocating. Endeavours to remedy this have ended in a recommendation to rebuild the prison entirely as nothing less will serve. The cells are large enough, ten feet in length by five feet wide, and it is yet essential to keep the traps in the door constantly open to prevent asphyxiation.

Strict individual separation was the rule established in this St. Petersburg House of Detention, and it extended to both cells and exercising yards. The space allotted to the latter was circular in shape and was divided into segments by walls radiating from a common centre to the circumference. Each inmate walked to and fro singly in his own compartment, under the surveillance of an official standing on a raised platform in the centre. Nothing was visible from within the partition but the backs

of the lofty prison buildings topped with a narrow strip of sky.

The rule of cellular isolation was defeated, however, by the ancient prison device of rapping on the walls according to a conventional alphabet based upon a fixed number of blows for each letter. The letters are arranged in certain groups as follows: —

a	b	c	d	e	f
g	h	i	k	l	m
n	o	p	r	s	t
u	v	w	x	y	z

Words are composed by knocking so many times on the wall for each letter. First, the horizontal line on which the letter stands is counted and its place numbered on the vertical line. Thus to frame the word "you," the first signal for "y" would be four knocks, indicating the vertical line; then a pause and five taps to give the place on the horizontal line. Three taps followed after a short pause by two taps would form the letter "o," and four short taps with one final tap after a pause would fix the letter "u." These sounds are not only distinguishable in cells alongside each other but in those far distant if the wall is the same. Communications by this means passed continually, although the system was abhorrent to the authorities and severe punishments were imposed upon all caught in the act.

Punishments were the only break in the monot-

ony of this dull solitary life, and they were varied and ingenious. A prisoner guilty of minor offences, such as smoking or the secreting of a match or a morsel of bread saved from a meal, might be condemned to kneel for a couple of hours on the bare flags of a freezingly cold thoroughfare, or be cast into a dark cell, originally intended for cases of ophthalmia, and kept there for months, frequently until he became blind or mad or both. Cruelty was of common occurrence in this House of Detention. It was here that General Trepov ordered a prisoner Bogolubov to be flogged for not removing his hat when he came into the great man's presence, and punished others who protested by confining them in cells near the lavatory amidst all kinds of filth, and heated to a temperature of 110 degrees Fahrenheit.

The personal experiences of an officer who spent a long time in a prison near St. Petersburg were afterward published in a liberal journal. "In the evening," he reports, "the governor went his rounds and usually began his favourite occupation — flogging. A very narrow bench was brought out and soon the place resounded with shrieks, while the governor smoked a cigar and looked on, counting the lashes. The birch rods were of exceptional size, and when not in use were kept immersed in water to make them more pliant. After the tenth lash the shrieking ceased, and nothing was heard but groans. Flogging was usually applied on

groups of five or ten men or more at one time, and when the execution was over a great pool of blood remained to mark the spot. People in the street without would cross themselves and pass to the other side. After every such scene we had two or three days of comparative peace; for the flogging had a soothing effect on the governor's nerves."

"On one occasion," says the same writer, "we were visited by an inspector of prisons. After casting a look down at us, he asked if our food was good or if there was anything else of which we could complain. Not only did the inmates declare that they were completely satisfied; they even enumerated articles of diet which we had never so much as smelled." The food here and elsewhere was neither plentiful nor palatable. "It consisted of a quarter of a pound of black bread for breakfast; and a soup made of bull's heart or liver, or of seven pounds of meat, twenty pounds of waste oats, twenty pounds of sour cabbage and plenty of water." The daily sum allowed to cover cost was one penny, three farthings, not a great deal when officials expected to embezzle a substantial part.

Leo Deutsch, an important political prisoner, says that his daily ration of black bread was two pounds, with a dinner at midday of two dishes, not bad, but insufficient and always half cold, as the kitchen was far away. This was in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. At the "Butirki" — this was the popular name for the central prison of Moscow —

the food, he says, "was beneath criticism; even the most robust at their hungriest could scarcely swallow a spoonful of the repulsive malodorous broth in wooden bowls brought to our cells at mid-day. This is explained by the fact that the sum originally provided by government for our maintenance was extremely small; and on its way through to us a great part of it found its way into the bottomless pockets of officials great and small, among whom there is an organised system of general peculation. The big cauldrons used for cooking the food of several thousand prisoners were filled up with the worst materials that were procurable."

George Kennan in his "Siberia" tells us he tasted the soup in the kitchen of the Tiumen, or forwarding prison, and "found it nutritious and good." The bread was rather sour and heavy, but not worse than that prepared and eaten by Russian peasants generally. The daily ration of the prisoners consisted of two and a half pounds of this black bread, about six ounces of boiled meat, and two or three ounces of coarsely ground barley or oats with a bowl of *kvas* morning and evening for drink.

Carl Joubert says, "I inspected the rations in the prison at Tomsk. The soup stank with the odour of a soap factory. I asked for a piece of bread from a warder, and when I had examined it I called for a bowl of warm water. I put the bread to soak

in the water, and in a couple of minutes I handed the wooden bowl to Dr. Anatovich, and asked him to look at it. 'Why should I examine it?' he asked. But a moment later I heard him exclaim: 'My God! My God!' The surface of the water was covered with worms." The soup at the infamous prison fortress of the Schlüsselburg often contained cockroaches floating on the surface, and the director thus explained their presence to a complainant: Whenever the copper lid is lifted, the steam rises to the ceiling and dislodges the cockroaches which fall into the soup.

Various attempts have been made to bring the Russian prisons into line with the more modern development of penal principles, but they have never been carried out consistently nor resulted in marked reforms. A good deal of money has been spent in constructing new buildings on the most approved plans, and the favourite theory in vogue, that of cellular confinement, has been adopted to a limited extent. Such enormous numbers have to be dealt with, and over such a wide area, that no comprehensive uniform system could possibly be introduced to meet even a fraction of the demand. But a certain number of cellular prisons were provided, seemingly with the idea of intensifying the pains and penalties of imprisonment.

The prison at Kharkov was one of the worst of its class; the cells were dark and damp, and the régime of solitary confinement was unduly pro-

longed. The most terrible sufferings were endured by the political prisoners who were chiefly lodged in them, until special prisons were appropriated for them, such as those of St. Peter and St. Paul and the Schlüsselburg. At Kharkov a "hunger strike" was organised, the fixed resolve to abstain altogether from food—a form of protest common enough in Russian prisons until a remedy was applied to their grievances. Concessions were then made to the extent of permitting exercise in the open air, removing fetters from the limbs of the sick in hospital and giving daily employment, but not before disastrous results had shown themselves. Six of the political prisoners went out of their minds and several died.

During the time that the Kharkov prison was used for this class of offenders, it was the scene of some startling events. Several escapes and attempts at rescue occurred. The case of Hypolyte Myshkin, a determined and most courageous man, was remarkable and deserving of more success. Myshkin was lodged at Kharkov in a small cell on the lower story, which had once been occupied by Prince Tsitianov, a distinguished revolutionist. He concentrated all his energies upon contriving escape, and within the first year had manufactured a dummy figure to lie on the guard-bed in his place, and proceeded to excavate a tunnel beneath the prison wall. He had no implements except his hands and a small piece of board, but he dug deep

and far, disposing of the earth by packing it into a space between the floor of his cell and the ground. He had also made a suit of clothes to substitute for the prison uniform when at large. The material used for this purpose was obtained from a number of old maps, given to the former occupant of the cell and which had been left lying on the stove. Myshkin soaked the paper off the muslin on which it was mounted, and made a shirt and a pair of trousers. He was actually on the point of departure, when, unfortunately, a gaoler visited his cell at an unusual hour. He was down in his tunnel, and the dummy betrayed him. The alarm was raised, the other end of the tunnel was entered, and the fugitive was caught in a trap. He was transferred to another cell from which there was no prospect of escape.

Myshkin, hopeless and reckless, now sought freedom in death. Resolving to commit an offence which would entail capital punishment, he obtained leave to attend divine service at the prison church, and managed to get close to the governor, whom he struck in the face when in the act of kissing the cross in the hands of the officiating priest. Under ordinary conditions, trial and condemnation to death would follow, but just at this time the distressing state of affairs at Kharkov had caused so much uneasiness that the Minister of the Interior had sent a sanitary expert to report upon the conditions which had produced so much lunacy and

so many deaths. Professor Dobroslavin pronounced the place unfit for human habitation, and urged the immediate removal of all political convicts. It was no doubt supposed that Myshkin was of unsound mind when he struck the governor, and he was not even tried for the offence, but shortly afterward was despatched to the far-off silver mines of Kara.

Myshkin's antecedents and his ultimate fate are of interest. He was a young student at the Technological Institute of St. Petersburg in 1870, when, fired by the ardent spirit of the new revolutionists, he conceived a bold project to effect the escape of the well-known author and political writer, Chernyshevski, at that time in Siberian exile. After spending some time in the old Alexandrovski central prison near Irkutsk, the prisoner was presently interned under police surveillance in Villuisk, a small village in the subarctic province of Yakutsk. Myshkin planned to travel across Asia disguised as a captain of gendarmerie, present a forged order to the head of the police at Villuisk, desiring him to hand over Chernyshevski to the sham captain, who was to escort him to another place on the Amur river. Myshkin got safely to Irkutsk, where he was employed in the office of the gendarmerie and became greatly trusted. He had the freedom of the office and cleverly abstracted the necessary blank forms, forged the signatures, affixed the seals, got his uniform, and, thus provided with all proper cre-

dentials, appeared before the *ispravnik*, or local chief of police, at Villuisk, who received him with all deference and respect. Myshkin was a man of fine presence, eloquent and well spoken, and when he produced his order he was within an ace of success.

But there was a weak point in the plot. It was quite unusual for officers of rank to travel without escort, and Myshkin had not had sufficient funds to take with him confederates disguised as soldiers or gendarmes. The *ispravnik* grew suspicious, the more so as the exile Chernyshevski was an important political offender, and he hesitated to surrender him without seeing his way more clearly. He told Myshkin that he must have the authority of the governor to set his exile free. Myshkin, unabashed, offered to go in person to seek the governor's consent, and he set off for Yakutsk, attended by a complimentary escort of Cossacks. The *ispravnik* astutely sent another Cossack to pass them on the road with a letter of advice for the governor. The messenger caught up with the first party and made no secret of his mission.

The game was up, and Myshkin, in despair, made a bolt for the woods. The Cossacks promptly gave chase, but Myshkin drew his revolver, beat off his pursuers and succeeded in getting away. He wandered through the forests for a week, and was at last captured, half dead from cold and privation. He was lodged first in the prison of Ir-

kutsk and then brought to St. Petersburg, where he was thrown into the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, and he lay there for three years in a solitary cell awaiting trial. He was kept in the Trubetskoi Bastion, near a prisoner whom Mr. Kennan afterward met in Siberia and who described his neighbour's sufferings feelingly. "Myshkin," he said, "was often delirious from fever, excitement or the maddening effect of long solitary confinement, and I frequently heard his cries when he was put into a strait-jacket or strapped to his bed by the fortress guard."

Myshkin's trial caused a great sensation. The government had refused to allow the proceedings to be taken down in shorthand, and the prisoner declined to make any defence; he made a fiery speech, however, denouncing the secrecy of the trial and declaring that the public ought to hear the whole case through the press. He was ordered out of court, and being removed by force, his last words, half stifled, were: "This court is worse than a house of ill-fame; there they sell only bodies, but here you prostitute honour, justice and law." This insult aggravated the original offence, and the court increased his sentence to ten years' penal servitude with forfeiture of all civil rights.

Myshkin was a born orator, but by his own admission he lived to regret his eloquence. When on his long journey to Eastern Siberia, one of his comrades died at Irkutsk, and he was moved to

make a brief oration at the funeral. He spoke out in church, eulogising the high moral character of the deceased, and declaring that "out of the ashes of this heroic man and others like him will grow the tree of liberty for Russia." Here the police interfered; Myshkin was dragged out of church and sentenced later to an additional fifteen years' penal servitude. So it was said of him that he never made but two speeches in his life, one of which cost him ten and the other fifteen years of imprisonment. Myshkin regretted the second speech, which, he said, would do no good, as the world could not hear; it was the mere gratification of a personal impulse, and it added so many years to his detention, that, even if he lived to emerge from exile, he would be too aged to work effectively in the cause of Russian freedom.

Myshkin afterward escaped from Kara, when a more rigorous régime had been introduced by Count Loris Melikov, and permission to work in the open air had been withdrawn. One prisoner, Semyonovski, driven to desperation, committed suicide, and several condemned to long terms made up their minds to break prison. Myshkin and a comrade were the first to go; a second and a third pair followed; a fourth couple were caught in the act, and the authorities, spurred on to extreme activity by the presence at Kara of the head of the prison department, recaptured six of the fugitives. Myshkin succeeded in reaching Vladivostok, and was on

the point of embarking on board a foreign ship when he was recognised and retaken.

Myshkin and thirteen others who were deemed dangerous were sent back to St. Petersburg in 1883, where they were lodged at first in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul and then in the "stone bags" of the fortress of Schlüsselburg. The dread of insanity from a new term of solitary confinement drove Myshkin to repeat the same tactics as at Kharkov. He struck one of the officers, and found more prompt retaliation this time, for he was tried by court-martial and shot.

Another striking incident occurred at the Kharkov prison. Two prisoners on their way there were nearly rescued by an attack on the prison van. One of the guards was shot, and the release would have been effected had not the horses taken fright and stampeded, which led to their recapture. The attack was made by a number of mounted men, armed, and one of these, Alexei Medvediev, also called Fomin, was afterward caught in Kharkov station. He was committed to the gaol, but managed to escape with a party of ordinary criminals by burrowing under a wall. They did not get farther than a wood near-by when they were recaptured. Medvediev's friends arranged a plan to set him free again. Two of them, disguised as gendarmes, brought a forged order to the prison gate calling for the prisoner, who was to be escorted, they said, to the gendarmerie office for examina-

tion. The false gendarmes were detected and taken into custody, sent for trial and condemned to death. The sentence was afterward commuted to penal servitude for life, and they were sent to Kara. Medvediev was treated after the same fashion, but he was detained in various prisons of Western Siberia, closely guarded, and was at last returned to the Alexis Ravelin in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul for five or six years. He is described by a comrade — Leo Deutsch — as “a man of consummate bravery who literally despised danger, and was always ready to embark on the most terrible adventure. He had been a postilion and had received only a scanty education at an elementary school, but by his own exertions he had gained a respectable amount of knowledge. . . . At Kara he became an adept in various handicrafts; he was an excellent tailor, shoemaker, engraver and sculptor, and afterward, when he was living as a free exile, he became a watchmaker and goldsmith. Unfortunately, soon after he left the prison he fell a victim to alcoholism, to which he had an inherited predisposition; all attempts at reclaiming him were vain, and in a few years he was beyond hope.”

CHAPTER II

TWO FAMOUS FORTRESSES

The fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul — Political prisoners confined within its walls from an early date — Used by Peter the Great — The imprisonment of the author, Chernyshevski — Dmitri Pisarev — The Trubetzkoi Bastion — Kropotkin's account of the prison — Leo Deutsch's experiences there — The sad case of Netchaiev — Probability that he was flogged to death — Severity of the régime of the Alexis Ravelin — The fate of prisoners confined in Schlüsselburg unknown — The prison of Kiev — Leo Deutsch confined there — Succeeds in making his escape — Other escapes — Prison of Moscow — General depot for exiles about to embark for Siberia — Account of the journey to Siberia by train — Kindliness shown by the peasants — Food and gifts of clothing brought to the train for the exiles — The Red Cross League — The exiles' begging song — Treatment of the "politicals" — Dastievich and the governor — Women revolutionists.

THE government of the Czar was not slow to avail itself of the coercive means afforded by cellular confinement, and to use them especially against political offenders. At first these prisoners were distributed among the common criminal prisons such as that of Kharkov, and located, where the accommodation existed, in "secret" or solitary confinement cells. According to George Kennan, the secret cells in Siberian prisons were intended

for persons accused of murder and other capital crimes. They had neither beds nor sleeping platforms and contained no furniture. Their occupants slept without pillows or bed clothing on the cold cement or stone floor, and during the day they had either to sit or lie on this floor, or to stand.

The politicals at Kara in Eastern Siberia lived under "dungeon conditions," absolutely apart, breathing foul air continually, starving on bad and insufficient food and completely deprived of exercise. The need for separate prisons nearer home led presently to the adaptation of existing fortresses in or close to St. Petersburg, such as the St. Peter and St. Paul on the banks of the Neva, and the Schlüsselburg or "Castle of Stone-bags" on an island in Lake Ladoga, whose waters lap the base of its walls. The records of these formidable places of durance are made up of human suffering.

The first named, the "Petropaolovskaya," is never mentioned by Russians without a shudder. It is stained indelibly with the imprint of appalling cruelty and savage ill-treatment. Its grim, gray bastions crouch low, flush with the water's edge, opposite the imperial palace, and in full view of the great city. Within its extensive perimeter are included several fine buildings; the mint, the cathedral, the burial place of the reigning dynasty, military barracks and well filled arsenals, while the ordinary street traffic passes through it in the day time.

From its earliest days this fortress was the scene of murderous and cruel atrocities. Peter the Great used it recklessly when imposing his will upon the enslaved people; torture, the lash, horrible mutilations and death were continually inflicted within its gloomy walls. Peter is said to have executed his only son Alexis in this fortress. Defeated conspirators against autocracy constantly languished in its deep sunken dungeons or were thrown into the Neva from its battlements. Generations of unsuccessful revolutionists, during reign after reign, have eaten out their hearts here in lifelong imprisonment. Many of the "Dekabrists," mostly nobles who rose against the Czar Nicholas in 1826, lingered in one of its cells for twelve years. Since then, numbers of hapless people, defeated in their vain efforts to compass freedom and liberal institutions for their country, have been imprisoned, neglected and forgotten in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul.

The fortifications of St. Peter and St. Paul cover an extent of three hundred acres. It is a five-sided or pentagonal work, constructed on the old-fashioned plan of Vauban, having six conventional bastions and two salient ravelins, one on the eastern and the other on the western front. To the northward, on the far side of the Neva, leading away from the city and partly overlooking the zoological gardens, is a crown work or hornwork of red brick built by Nicholas I. Various parts of the fortress

The Fortress of Peter and Paul, St. Petersburg.

The famous fortress of Peter and Paul stands in delibly with the imprint of appalling cruelty and savage ill treatment. Its grim grey walls rise opposite the Imperial Palace in St. Petersburg. Within the enclosure are several buildings, including the burial place of the Cæars. In the day time a busy street traffic passes through it. Peter the Great is said to have executed his only son, Alexis, in this fortress after torture. Many noted conspirators against the government of the Cæars languished in its deep, unken dungeons or have been thrown into the river Neva from its battlements.

From its earliest days this fortress was the scene of numerous and cruel atrocities. Peter the Great was suddenly seized, imposing his will upon the Russian people; torture, the last, horrible punishments and death were continually inflicted within its gloomy walls. Peter is said to have executed not only war leaders in this fortress. Toldstod conspirators against autocracy commonly hanged in its dungeons.

*The Fortress of Peter and Paul,
St. Petersburg*

The famous fortress of "Peter and Paul" is stained indelibly with the imprint of appalling cruelty and savage ill-treatment. Its grim, gray walls rise opposite the Imperial Palace in St. Petersburg. Within the enclosure are several fine buildings, including the burial place of the Czars. In the daytime ordinary street traffic passes through it. Peter the Great is said to have executed his only son, Alexis, in this fortress, after torture. Many noted conspirators against the government of the Czar have languished in its deep sunken dungeons or have been thrown into the river Neva from its battlements.

The battlements of the Peter and St. Paul cover a square of about hundred acres. It is a five-sided polygon with bastions on the old-fashioned plan of Vauban, having six conventional bastions and two blunt angles one on the eastern and one on the western front. To the north-east, on the side of the Neva, leading away from the river and partly overlooking the biological garden, is a prison work of red brick built by Nicholas I. Various parts of the fortress



have been appropriated for prison purposes. One of the most famous was the so-called "Courtine" of Catherine, connecting the south and west bastions, facing the Neva; the bastion on the west being known as the Trubetzkoi. This also became a famous prison, for when completed and opened, being newer, more spacious and safer, it largely replaced the Courtine, now no more than a place of detention for officers under arrest for breaches of discipline.

Some notable prisoners have been lodged in the Courtine of Catherine. Chernyshevski wrote his novel "What is to be done?" in one of its cells, — a book which had potent, widespread influence over the youth of Russia, and which greatly developed the usefulness of women in the revolutionary propaganda by raising their status. He is the gifted writer who inspired the chivalrous attempt of the student Myshkin to effect his release, as already described. Another inmate of prominent literary attainments was Dmitri Pisarev, who devoted himself while imprisoned to writing his remarkable analysis of Darwin's "Origin of Species." He was confined without even the form of trial, and was held a close prisoner until his mental powers waned. Soliviov was the last "political" immured in the Courtine, but individuals have been sent there from the Trubetzkoi Bastion when special isolation was deemed necessary. One, Saburev, was removed to one of its cells, where he was stupefied with

drugs so that he might be photographed while insensible.

The best account of the Trubetzkoï Bastion and its prison is to be found in Count Kropotkin's book, "In Russian and French Prisons." He spent more than two years there after 1873. The prison was in the *reduit*, an inner building of vaulted casements conforming to the five sides of the main bastion and constructed within to serve as a second line of defence. One side was taken up by the quarters of the governor of the fortress, and two sides were occupied by cells on two stories. These cells were spacious enough for a gun of large calibre; they were not light, for the windows opened upon the interior enclosure, and the high wall of the outer bastion faced the windows at a distance of fifteen or twenty feet. In St. Petersburg the sky is often overcast, but Kropotkin was able to write his book on the Glacial period in his cell, and to prepare his maps and plans on especially bright days. A lining of felt covered the cell walls, at a distance of five inches, intended to prevent communication by knocking, which nevertheless frequently took place.

The cells in this prison were heated from the corridor outside by large stoves, and the temperature was kept high to prevent the exudation of moisture on the walls. It was necessary to close the stove doors very soon and while the coal was blazing, with the result that asphyxiating gases were gen-

erated and the inmates ran the risk of being suffocated. An idea prevailed that the authorities purposely caused these mephitic gases to enter the cells so that the prisoners might be poisoned, but this was an exaggeration with no foundation in fact. The food at one time was good, but Kropotkin says that it deteriorated, and no provisions were permitted to be brought in from outside except the Christmas and Eastertide doles of white bread, charitably given by compassionate merchants. Books, if approved, might be received from relatives, and there was a small prison library. Out-of-door exercise was allowed daily from half an hour to forty minutes, but in the short daylight of the northern winter it was limited to twenty minutes twice a week.

On the whole, detention in the Trubetzkoi Bastion was not, according to Kropotkin, "exceedingly bad, although always hard." One of its worst features was the unduly prolonged solitary confinement, which was extended to two or three years, far beyond the limit ordinarily prescribed in modern civilised countries. Another terrible infliction was the dead silence compelled. "Not a word is heard," wrote Leo Deutsch, "the silence is intense. No one could imagine that men live here year after year. Only the chimes of the clock upon the ear, sound out every quarter of an hour the national hymn, 'How glorious' is our Lord in Zion.'" As to this, Kropotkin says, "The cac-

ophony of the discordant bells is horrible during rapid changes of temperature, and I do not wonder that nervous people consider these bells as one of the plagues of the fortress." The same writer bears witness to the taciturnity of the officials. "If you address a word to the warder who brings you your clothes for walking in the yard, if you ask him what the weather is, he never answers. The only human being with whom I exchanged a few words every morning was the colonel (governor) who came to write down what I wanted to buy: tobacco or paper. But he never dared to enter into conversation, as he himself was always watched by some of the warders."

The fortress contained other prisons far worse than that of the bastion. There was the Trubetzkoi Ravelin to the west of it, the cells in which are so dark that candles are burned in them for twenty-two hours out of the twenty-four. Their walls were literally dripping with moisture and there were pools of water on the floor. An account of the sufferings of some who were concerned in the "Trial of the Sixteen," whose death sentences had been commuted to imprisonment in the ravelin, was published in the *Narodnaya Volya*. "Not only books were prohibited, but everything that might help to occupy the attention. Zubkovski made geometrical figures with his bread to practise geometry, and they were immediately removed by the gaoler, who said that hard-labour prisoners were not per-

mitted to amuse themselves." Of those whose sentences were commuted one became consumptive and another was attacked with scurvy and brought to death's door. Two of the five condemned to hard labour in the same fortress went mad, and one attempted to commit suicide.

One of a party transferred to the Moscow prison was so helpless from scorbutic wounds that he was carried out of the cellular wagon in a handbarrow. Two fainted as soon as they were taken into the open air. Tatiana Lebedieva had been sentenced to twenty years' hard labour. "But," says the medical report, "she cannot live so long. Scurvy has destroyed all her gums; the jaws are visible beneath; she is moreover in an advanced stage of consumption." Another, a mother, was nursing her eighteen months' old baby, and every minute it seemed the child must die in her arms. As for herself, she did not suffer much, either physically or morally.

Regarding the Alexis Ravelin on the eastern front, no very authentic details are forthcoming, but it is said to contain underground cells as bad as any *oubliettes* in the dark ages. The only proof of their existence is to be found in the fact that a number of soldiers of the garrison were tried by court-martial for having conducted a clandestine correspondence for some of the prisoners, carrying out letters for them and smuggling in newspapers, money and other prohibited articles. The prisoners

concerned were nameless. The inevitable fate of those committed to the Alexis Ravelin was to lose their identity; they were forgotten and became mere numbers, only distinguished by the numerals of the *oubliettes* they occupied. This happened to one, Netchaiev, who killed a spy at Moscow and fled to Switzerland, from where he was extradited by the authorities of a free country, but on condition that he should be tried as a common-law prisoner. Netchaiev absolutely disappeared after he was tried at Moscow and sentenced to hard labour. There is no record of his incarceration in any central prison or of his departure for Siberia. It is nearly certain that he was lost to all knowledge in some hidden depth of the Schlüsselburg fortress.

Netchaiev was treated with great inhumanity. Overtures had been made to him by General Potapov to turn informer, and so insultingly that the prisoner struck the general in the face. For this he was flogged terribly, chained hand and foot and riveted to the cell wall. He managed to appeal direct to the Czar, Alexander II, in a letter written with his own finger nail and in his own blood; a modest letter stating the facts of his imprisonment, and asking if they were really known to the emperor and met with his sanction. This letter was entrusted to some one working under his window, but it was intercepted and the ultimate fate of the prisoner was never positively known. It was said that he had died of a second flogging, and posthu-

mous letters attributed to him were published in the year 1883.

The régime of the Alexis Ravelin was brutally severe. Exercise was forbidden, the windows of the cells were boarded up, and the hot-air openings of the stove were closed, so that consumption rapidly developed in the feeble frames of the prisoners. It was fatal to one young man, Shirayev, whose crime was too free comment upon the state of affairs. He had dared to prophesy a time when the Czar would no more govern, and power would be held by popular representatives. Another, Shevich, an officer of the military academy, went mad in the Alexis Ravelin, to which he was committed for having left the ranks and improperly addressing Alexander III on the occasion of an imperial parade.

Despite the elaborate precautions taken, and the strict rules prescribed, the secrecy of the Alexis Ravelin could not be kept inviolate. The government hoped that the silence of the grave might close over its captives. But too many travelled the sad road, and news came back from some. Letters penetrated the thick walls; the inmates found sympathy with their gaolers, who would not remain invariably mute. Some more effectual tomb for the living must be devised, and a large sum (150,000 rubles) was forthwith expended upon the enlargement and improvement, from a disciplinary point of view, of the ancient castle of Schlüsselburg, once the favourite prison of Paul I.

This new prison became available in 1884, and was to be the receptacle for the most dangerous and influential politicals. It was freely admitted by the authorities that the very harshest régime would prevail there: close confinement, scanty diet and entire absence of all that makes life endurable, — books, correspondence, the visits of relatives and friends. Above all, when the gates closed on a new arrival in the Schlüsselburg, hope died within him. Lifelong imprisonment was before him; there was no release this side of the grave. Few who enter the prison are ever set free again. The inmates are buried alive, suffering perpetual martyrdom.

It was here that the "humane" Peter the Great imprisoned his first wife, the unhappy Evdokia. He had forced her to enter a convent as he had become tired of her. Young and beautiful, she rebelled against the life of a working nun, and when, a few years later, a young army officer was detailed to inspect the convent, they fell in love with each other. When Peter heard of this, he had the officer impaled on a stake, and at the instigation of his new wife, the empress Catherine, Evdokia was thrust into the Schlüsselburg. The stone tower which she occupied and where she died is still known as the "Czarina's Bower."

In a cell underneath this stone tower, the great Polish patriot Valerian Lukasinski spent the greater part of the thirty-seven years of his imprisonment in the fortress. He had previously been immured in a

Polish prison for nine years, so that he endured a continuous imprisonment of forty-six years, and died in the Schlüsselburg at the age of eighty-two.

The castle of Schlüsselburg figured in the war with Charles XII when Peter the Great took it from the Swedes in 1702. It stands just where the Neva issues from Lake Ladoga, a bare fortress on a lonely island. A small, desolate town surrounds it, whose sparse inhabitants are easily kept under surveillance, and access to the castle is impossible for any but those authorised or permitted by the police.

The political prison was emptied in 1905; the prisoners were freed, and the building was thrown open to the public for inspection. It was supposed this would end the gruesome history of the fortress as a prison, but just one year later, after the triumph of the reactionists, it was again put to use as a place of durance, and instead of the few veteran politicals who were liberated in 1905, three hundred revolutionists were crowded into the prison under fearful conditions.

A French publicist, M. Eugene Petit, a member of the bar, seems to have visited the prison, and his report appeared in the *Revue Penitentiare* of July, 1906.

The government has always chosen to send whom it pleases to this state prison and to subject them to such treatment as it pleases, usually of the most arbitrary and rigorous kind. The leading idea is absolute isolation in cells of limited dimensions, nine

feet by seven feet. The furniture is of the conventional kind; an iron flap, fastened to the wall when not in use, supplies the bed, but cannot be let down except between eight o'clock in the evening and six in the morning, and at other times rest can only be obtained by lying on the floor. A petroleum lamp lights the cells while darkness lasts, which in winter is for eighteen hours out of the twenty-four, and this has a very injurious effect on the eyesight besides vitiating the air; the windows are high and glazed with opaque glass. The prisoner is kept constantly under observation through the "judas" or inspection plate in the door, and a warder in slippered feet comes to look through every five minutes. The dietary is characterised as detestable and quite insufficient. The early morning meal consists of cabbage soup, *shchi*, and *kasha*, a kind of porridge, with black bread often full of worms.

To complete isolation is added deadly silence and unbroken idleness. Not a word is uttered anywhere in the neighbourhood of a prisoner; the warders never speak to them, but issue orders by signs and gestures. Books are withheld until after a long period of confinement and when the mind is failing, and then only devotional works are allowed. Brief exercise in the open air is conceded after about the same lapse of time, first for a quarter of an hour, then half an hour, and when over, a warder carefully brushes away the footsteps lest it might be imagined they had been made by a friend. Em-

ployment is also given as a great favour, — permission to remove a little sand from a heap, which the next prisoner shovels back to the old place.

All communication from without or within is peremptorily forbidden. No news of the day comes in; no report of the condition of prisoners filters out. Konachevich's father died after years of fruitless inquiry, without hearing where his son was or whether he was still alive. A prisoner, Polivanov, left the prison in 1902 to hear that his father had died thirteen years before. It was not until 1896, that a prisoner, when he died in hospital, was allowed to have a single friend or comrade at his bedside. He was quite alone. Every sort of humiliation was inflicted upon him. He was never permitted to use the familiar address "thou" to his warders, although they spoke to him in that way in the second person and he must not resent it.

A retired military officer named Lagovskoi was shut up in Schlüsselburg in 1885 by "administrative process," without trial, and sentenced for five years, which was prolonged for another five years, still without trial. For having dared to address the governor with the familiar "thou," he was confined in a strait-jacket and his legs were tied together; then they gagged him, and holding him just a yard above the ground dropped him repeatedly till his head was cut open. The same treatment was administered to another prisoner, Popov, who was also gagged and his head banged upon the floor.

The effect of the imprisonment was seen in its results. In the six years after 1891, just forty-eight persons were removed into Schlüsselburg from the Alexis Ravelin, all of them young and in sound health at the time. At the end of these six years, five had committed suicide or had been shot, three were still retained but were out of their minds, three had died insane, nine others had died, the majority of them carried off by consumption. Twenty out of forty-eight was a large proportion, and the fact is authenticated by M. Petit, who can give the names and exact dates.

After the year 1896, the rigours of the régime were in some measure slackened. Books were allowed, such as scientific manuals, grammars and dictionaries for the study of languages, and historical books of a date previous to the eighteenth century, but no works of a purely literary character and no periodicals, reviews or newspapers. Writing materials were issued, a few sheets during the daytime, which, with whatever was written thereon, were withdrawn in the evening. By degrees the dietary was slightly improved, the period of exercise was prolonged and the prisoners were occasionally allowed to work in the garden or in the carpenter's shop. Still better, association with a fellow prisoner for a brief space was conceded twice a week when at exercise. Later, extracts from the letters of relatives were read out to the prisoner once yearly, communicating a brief message such

as, "We are alive and well and living at such and such a place." By and by the prisoners were permitted to reply no less briefly, but never to state where they were confined.

Two provincial prisons were much concerned with political prisoners, those of Kiev and Moscow. The former was the scene of many tragic episodes, and fierce conflicts between the revolutionists and the authorities. Some remarkable escapes were made from them. The university of Kiev was a hot-bed of political unrest, and its students were active and determined conspirators. An independent spirit was always present in the prison, the product of past resistance. It was from Kiev that the well-known Leo Deutsch escaped with two others in 1878, through the courageous assistance of a comrade Frolenko, who managed as a free man to get a false passport and obtain employment as a warder in the prison. He took the name of Michael and was in due course appointed to take charge of the corridor in which his friends Deutsch, Stefanovich and Bohanovsky were located. They had pretended to protest against his coming to their ward so as to disarm suspicion.

Frolenko set to work without loss of time. He provided disguises, two suits of private clothes and a warder's uniform, which the prisoners put on, and he then released them from their cells. As they were stumbling along the passage, one of them tripped against a rope which he caught at and

pulled frantically. It proved to be the alarm bell of the prison and caused a deafening noise. The false "Michael" at once explained to the authorities what he had done unwittingly, and the disturbance passed off without further discovery. Again the fugitives, who had hidden themselves in the first corners they found, started on their journey and got out of the prison, where a confederate met the party and led them to the river and to a boat stored with provisions which awaited them. They voyaged along the Dnieper for a whole week, concealing themselves when necessary in the long rushes, and at last reached Kremenchug, where they were furnished with passports and money and successfully passed the frontier. "Michael" went with them, and it was long supposed by the officials that he had been made away with by the prison breakers.

Beverley, a young man of English extraction, met death when escaping from the Kiev prison. He had been arrested for living under a false passport and being active in the revolutionary propaganda with a comrade Isbitski. He had driven a tunnel from their cell to a point beyond the prison walls. The authorities had discovered the tunnel and had posted a party of soldiers at the exit, where the fugitives must emerge into the upper air. As soon as they appeared they were shot down. Beverley was mortally wounded, and as he lay on the ground he was despatched by

repeated bayonet stabs. Isbitski was also struck down, but was carried back alive after a severe beating.

Leo Deutsch gives other cases of escape that proved more successful. A student Ivanov was helped to freedom by the officer commanding the guard, Tihonov, who was a member of the *Narodnaya Volya* society, or the "Will of the People." Another prisoner disappeared under the most mysterious circumstances which were never explained. But the most important escape was in August, 1902, when eleven noted prisoners, arrested a short time before, broke prison in a body. They exercised every evening in the prison yard which was bounded on one side by an outer wall overlooking fields and which was unguarded on the outside. The prisoners got into the field, taking with them an iron anchor weighing twenty pounds, and a rope ladder. At a given moment some of them had fallen upon their warder, overpowered him, gagged and bound him. Two others, climbing on each other's shoulders, reached the top of the wall, where they pulled up the anchor, made it fast, and then secured the rope ladder, which served for the ascent of the prisoners on one side and their descent on the other. So much sympathy was felt for them in the town that they were effectually concealed when at large and provided with the necessary funds for leaving the country. Throughout the whole affair no blood was shed and no one was hurt. Many more es-

caped from Kiev in a different fashion, passing out of its walls to the scaffold.

The great central prison of Moscow, locally known as the "Butirki," served as a general depot for ordinary criminals on the point of departure as exiles about to be transported to Siberia. It is a vast establishment with accommodation for thousands; a mighty stone building which looks like a gigantic well. A great wall with a tower at each of the four corners encloses it, and the various classes of political were confined in these towers. In the north tower were the "administrative" exiles; in the "chapel" tower were those still under examination, and in another the female prisoners were kept. All the male political prisoners in Moscow wore chains and the convict dress. It was a degrading costume, made the more humiliating by the method of shaving the right side of the head and leaving the left side with the hair cut close.

To Leo Deutsch, who was subjected to the prison barber before leaving Kiev, the ordeal was extremely painful. He says: "When I saw my own face in the glass a cold shudder ran down my spine and I experienced a sensation of personal degradation to something less than human. I thought of the days — in Russia, not so long ago — when criminals were branded with hot irons.

"A convict was waiting ready to fasten on my fetters. I was placed on a stool and had to put my foot on an anvil. The blacksmith fitted an iron

ring round each ankle, and welded it together. Every stroke of the hammer made my heart sink, as I realised that a new existence was beginning for me.

“The mental depression into which I now fell was soon accompanied by physical discomfort. The fetters at first caused me intolerable pain in walking, and even disturbed my sleep. It also requires considerable practice before one can easily manage to dress and undress. The heavy chains — about thirteen pounds in weight — are not only an encumbrance, but are very painful, as they chafe the skin round the ankles; and the leather lining is but little protection to those unaccustomed to these adornments. Another great torment is the continual clinking of the chains. It is indescribably irritating to the nervous, and reminds the prisoner at every turn that he is a pariah among his kind, ‘deprived of all rights.’

“The transformation is completed by the peculiar convict dress, consisting of a grey gown, made of special material, and a pair of trousers. Prisoners condemned to hard labour wear a square piece of yellow cloth sewn on their gowns. The feet are clad in leather slippers nicknamed ‘cats.’ All these articles of clothing are inconvenient, heavy and ill-fitting.

“I hardly knew myself when I looked in the glass and beheld a fully attired convict. The thought possessed me, ‘For long years you will

have to go about in that hideous disguise.' Even the gendarme regarded me with compassion. 'What won't they do to a man?' he said. And I could only try to comfort myself by thinking how many unpleasant things one gets used to, and that time might perhaps accustom me even to this."

A later episode in the experience of Deutsch is rather amusing. Many of the ordinary prisoners were in the habit of ridding themselves of their chains, at first at night and afterward during the day. The trick was winked at by the warders. Deutsch called for a nail and a hammer and openly broke the rivets in the presence of his warders. "Go and tell the governor what I have done," he said, and the offender was haled into the presence of the great man who indignantly protested, saying that it was a serious business. "Not at all," replied Deutsch, "it should prove to you that I have no intention of attempting to escape. And you see I still keep them on tied up with string." Nothing more was said for the moment; nor was the barbarous practice insisted upon when the politicals stoutly refused to submit to it.

The immunity continued until the time of departure arrived, when the officer who was to command the convoy insisted upon the strict observance of the regulations. Deutsch and his comrades still refused to comply. They were determined to resist till the last, and kept together lest they might be overcome singly. Just as they were to be

marched off, they were told that if they chose to be examined by the prison doctor, he would excuse them from travelling on foot. When taken into his presence, a strong posse of warders fell upon them and overpowered them by sheer force. One by one they were dragged into a corner and held forcibly down on a bench while the barber shaved half their heads and the blacksmith firmly riveted the chains.

Dostoyevski, whose "Reminiscences of the Dead House," recording his personal experiences of convict life, are quoted, says that long afterward he shuddered at the mere thought of the head shaving: "The prison barbers lathered our skulls with cold water and scraped us afterward with their sawlike razors." Fortunately it was possible to evade the torture by payment. A fellow convict for one kopeck would shave anyone with a private razor. This man was never to be seen without a strop in his hand on which, night and day, he sharpened his razor, which was always in admirable condition. "He was really quite happy when his services were in request, and he had a very light hand, a hand of velvet." He was always known as "the Major," no doubt a survival of the old institution of the barber-surgeon, as military doctors often bear the rank of major.

There were some compensations for the political. One was the unvarying sympathy they evoked from the population on the rare occasions

when they came in contact with them. Kindly folk, when they could, forced charitable gifts upon them. When Deutsch and his party took the train at Moscow for Nizhni-Novgorod, the platform was crowded with well-wishers, and they started for Siberia amid the tears and sobs of friends and relatives, shouting affectionate farewells and joining in the plaintive melody struck up by the prisoners, many of whom sang beautifully. At the first station peasants and workmen came to the carriage windows unhindered, with humble offerings. One old woman pressed a kopeck, the smallest copper coin, upon Deutsch, crying, "Here! Take it in the Virgin's name. Take it, take it, my dear." She insisted when he protested he did not need it as much as many others. But he accepted it, and kept it as a remembrance of the warm-hearted old creature.

It was the same all along the road. Everywhere, as they passed, groups of people waved their hands with expressive gestures. It was the custom of the country to show compassion thus for "the children of misfortune," the kindly designation of the poorer classes for all prisoners. Deutsch, with his shaven head, convict garb and clanking chains, won especial interest. Many sought to serve him and begged him to write down any special article he was in need of and it should be sent after him.

There were societies formed to assist prisoners with presents of small useful articles when starting

for their dreary exile. Long before the party left Moscow, Deutsch and his companions were begged to make out a list of their requirements, and as they were fifty in number, and were to be half a year on the road, the demands on the kindness of their benefactors were not few. But at any cost and with much personal inconvenience, all that was asked for was given. These same friendly societies came under the officious attentions of the police, for a list of the members was once seized at a search of houses, and as they were supposed to belong to some secret associations with evil aims, they were immediately classed as a branch of the Red Cross League of the "People's Will" organisation. The most criminal action of the society was that of seeking to provide political prisoners with old clothes. Yet a number of arrests of members followed, and many of these perfectly harmless, well-meaning people were detained for some time in gaol.

The kindly custom prevails throughout Russia of sending gifts of food to the prisoners at festival seasons. The "Easter table" is generally the rule in Russian cities, when the master keeps open house and any visitor may enter to be hospitably entertained with food and drink. The principle is even carried further and helps to soften the hardships of the prisoners. At Moscow all manner of good things were sent in, Deutsch tells us: "Easter cakes, eggs, hams, poultry, and all that is customary, including several bottles of light wine and beer, so

that our Easter table was a magnificent sight. Under the superintendence of the old governor and his staff," he continues, "we spent the evening and half the night in a merry fashion not often witnessed in a prison. Songs were sung, there were jokes and laughter; finally a harmonica appeared, and the young people began to dance. Yet, despite so much hearty and unfeigned cheerfulness, not one of us could forget our real condition; indeed, the very sight of gaiety brought to the minds of many of us remembrance of home, where our dear ones were at this moment celebrating the feast-day, though with many sad thoughts of the absent."

It was the same in far-off Siberia. At Omsk, where Dostoyevski was confined for four years, gifts were sent to the prison at Christmastide in enormous quantities, — loaves of white bread, scones, rusks, pancakes and pastry of various kinds. There was not a shopkeeper in the whole town who did not send something to the "unfortunates." Among these gifts were some magnificent ones, including many cakes of the finest flour, and also some very poor ones, rolls worth no more than a couple of kopecks, the offerings of the poor to the poor, on which a last kopeck had been spent. These delicacies were divided in equal portions among the occupants of the various prison barracks, and caused neither protest or annoyance, as every one was satisfied.

There were good Samaritans in Siberia who

spent their lives in giving charitable assistance to the "unfortunates." Dostoyevski very rightly calls their compassion, which is quite disinterested, "something sacred." There was a lady in the town of Omsk who laboured unceasingly to assist all exiles and especially the convicts in the prison. It was conjectured that some dear one in her family had gone through a like punishment, and, in any case, she spared no effort to offer help and sympathy. The most she could do was but little, for she was very poor; "but," says the author, "we convicts felt when we were shut up in the prison that outside we had a devoted friend." He made her acquaintance when leaving the town, and with some of his comrades spent an entire evening at her house. "She was neither old nor young, neither pretty nor ugly. It was not easy to guess whether she was intelligent or high-bred. But in her actions could be seen infinite compassion, and an irresistible desire to please, to solace, to be in some way agreeable. All this could be read in the sweetness of her smile."

When her visitors left she gave each of them a cardboard cigar box of her own making. It was all but valueless, but the gift was inestimable as a proof of her desire to be remembered. Dostoyevski here analyses the theory that a great love for one's neighbour is only a form of selfishness, and asks very pertinently what selfishness could animate such a nature as this.

But for the charity of the Siberian peasantry, the terrible journey of many thousands into exile could never be accomplished. The government issues a beggarly allowance in cash, a sum varying between five and twelve kopecks per head, according to the locality, out of which the exiles provide their own food. The prices also vary with the season and the harvests. This money hardly suffices for the commonest ration; it will buy at most bread, a few vegetables and a little tea. Gambling is, however, such an ingrained vice that many waste all of their substance daily, and the spendthrifts would starve but for begging by the road. When a party passes a village, permission is sought from the convoy officer to raise the *miloserdnaya* or "exiles' begging song," and selected convicts go from door to door, cap in hand, soliciting alms.

This song is inconceivably pathetic. George Kennan, who often heard it, declares that it resembles nothing with which he was acquainted. It is not singing nor chanting, nor like wailing for the dead, but a strange blending of all three. "It suggests vaguely the confused and commingled sobs, moans and entreaties of human beings who were being subjected to torture, but whose sufferings were not acute enough to seek expression in shrieks or high pitched cries. . . . No attempt was made by the singers to pitch their voices in harmony or pronounce the words in unison. There were no pauses or rests at the ends of the lines, no distinctly

marked rhythm. The singers seemed to be constantly breaking in upon one another with slightly modulated variation of the same slow, melancholy air, and the effect produced was that of a rude fugue of a funeral chant." The following is an extract from the words sung : —

"Have pity on us, O our fathers!
"Do not forget the unwilling travellers,
"Do not forget the long imprisoned.
"Feed us, O our fathers — help us!
"Feed and help the poor and needy!
"Have compassion, O our fathers,
"Have compassion, O our mothers,
"For the sake of Christ, have mercy
"On the prisoners."

"If you can imagine these words, half sung, half chanted slowly, in broken time and in a low key, by hundreds of voices, to an accompaniment made by the jingling and clashing of chains, you will have a faint idea of the song. Rude, artless and inharmonious as the appeal for pity was, I never in my life heard anything so mournful and depressing. It seemed to be the half articulate expression of all the griefs, the misery and the despair that had been felt by generations of human beings in the *étapes*, the forwarding prisons and the mines."

The collections made both in cash and kind were taken on to the next halting place, when they were divided with scrupulous exactitude under the watchful control of the *artel*, or prisoners' association, which rules in every prison with an iron hand.

An advantage enjoyed by the political prisoners in Russian prisons is the affable demeanour of the official staff towards them. Every prison official as a rule treats them with a certain amount of courtesy and respect. This is due to an unwritten law arising from the long established belief that these "politicals" belonged to the educated and cultured classes, and that their offences, so-called, have been committed with high motives, in obedience to the dictates of reason and conscience, in the hope of improving the condition of the people and winning a greater measure of liberty and independence for their down-trodden nation. Superior officers were, as a rule, polite in their address, and subordinates spoke civilly and treated them with marked consideration. The prisoners watched jealously the attitude of their masters toward them, and fiercely resented any failure of respect, or anything that tended to lower their personal dignity.

Leo Deutsch tells a story of the sharp lesson in manners taught to a great functionary, the chief personage and head of the prison department, M. Galkin Vrasski. The incident occurred at Moscow when he was making a tour of inspection through the provincial prisons. The politicals had heard that, conscious of his power and self-importance, he was in the habit of entering cells, when visiting them, with his hat on. The first he reached was occupied by one Dashkievich, who had been a theological student, — "a man of very calm but unyielding

temperament, and permeated to an uncommon degree with the instinct of justice and fairness." The great chief entered with much ceremony, escorted by the governor and a brilliant staff, and asked Dashkievich pompously whether he had any complaint to make. "Pardon me," interrupted the prisoner quietly, "it is very impolite of you, sir, to enter my apartment without removing your hat." Vrasski reddened to the roots of his hair, turned on his heel and walked out, followed by his entire entourage.

He was at pains to ask the name of the man who had dared to reprove him thus openly. He had learned his lesson, for he appeared at all the other cells hat in hand. But the offence rankled, and as Deutsch avers, he took his revenge later. Dashkievich had been sentenced to "banishment to the less distant provinces of Siberia;" this was altered by Vrasski's order, and he was sent eventually to Tunka in the furthest wilds, on the border of Mongolia.

In this matter of removing the head-dress, the politicals were very punctilious. Once, on arrival at the Krasnoyarsk prison, which was chiefly cellular, a party of politicals had a serious conflict of opinion with the governor, who ordered that they should be placed in separate cells singly, instead of in association. They resented and positively refused to abide by this order, and demanded to be lodged as heretofore along the road, in company

with one another. Pending a change of decision, they remained in the corridor with their baggage, and would not budge a step. The governor of the prison insisted upon compliance with the regulations, and he was backed up by the chief of police, a very blustering and overbearing person. The prisoners would not yield and the matter was referred to higher authority, first to the colonel of gendarmerie, then to the public prosecutor, and lastly to the governor of the district. Nothing could be decided that night, and the prisoners, still obdurate, camped out in the passage, being permitted to have their own way until the district governor had been heard from.

As they sat at dinner the next day, the chief of police brought the answer. He was in full parade uniform and wore his helmet. "Gentlemen," he began ceremoniously, "I am to inform you" — He was abruptly interrupted by the request to first remove his helmet. The officer protested that when in parade uniform he was forbidden to do so. "Then we shall not listen to you," said the prisoner Lazarev. "We have nothing to do with your uniform. It is a mere question of manners." "But I really cannot, I will not," replied the officer. "Then you may take your message back to the governor, we shall not listen to it," was the answer of the politicals, and their firmness won the day. The result was a concession to their demands. "I wonder how many officials," remarks Deutsch,

"have had to learn this elementary lesson in politeness from us."

The women revolutionists also showed the highest spirit and were always ready to fight for their own rights. A police *ispravnik* had insulted a political, mistaking him for another with whom he had a difference. It came to the knowledge of the wife of the political, who was a clever resolute woman, and she went straight to the police office and boxed the officer's ears. The harshness with which one police officer, the chief at Irkutsk, had treated a number of women politicals brought down on him a severe rebuke. The officer accompanied a high official during a visit to the prison of that city. The moment he appeared he was addressed by the leading political prisoner in these words: "We are astonished at your impudence in daring to appear before us, after having by your treatment forced our women comrades into a terrible hunger strike." The room was hurriedly emptied of all officials, the chief and his suite, and the odious policeman was followed by a chorus of uncomplimentary epithets.

CHAPTER III

THE EXILE SYSTEM

The exile system — A principal secondary punishment — Reform of 19th century — Classification of exiles — The hideous march into Siberia — Infant mortality — Less than half the exiles sentenced by regular tribunals — Many banished by "administrative process" on arbitrary order — The "untrustworthy" — Power to banish exercised by many even minor authorities — Some cases of rank injustice — Monstrous ill-usage of a medical man — Dr. Bieli and his wife's insanity — Students and young schoolgirls exiled — Simple banishment — The exile's life in Siberia — Danger of protesting against ill-usage — Penalties of infringing rules — Surgeon forbidden to practise in a case of life and death — Terrors of banishment to the far north in the arctic province of Yakutsk — A living death — Denounced by Russian press.

AN account has been given of the most prominent Russian penal institutions in the mother country and of the prisons established for all offenders upon whom confinement has been generally imposed as a preparatory step to deportation. It remains to describe the system of Siberian exile, long the principal element of penal coercion known to the Russian code. For all alike, the undoubtedly guilty and the resolute patriots with high aims, but often violent methods, this penalty exists and has existed

for centuries, ever imposed recklessly with marked indifference to the human suffering it has entailed.

Banishment to the far-off wilds began soon after the vast region of Siberia became part of the Empire, that is to say, in the middle of the seventeenth century. It originated in the idea of "removal;" and was adopted as a convenient outlet for the wrecks of humanity who had survived the cruel, personal inflictions prescribed by savage laws. All who escaped the capital sentence and were neither impaled nor beheaded, endured secondary punishment of atrocious severity; they were flogged by the knout or bastinadoed; they were cruelly mutilated, their limbs were amputated or their tongues torn out; they were branded with hot irons or suspended in the air by hooks run into the ribs, and left to die a death of lingering torment. Those that were left were transported to Siberia.

What the system was and to a great extent still is, despite skin-deep reforms, with its most glaring evils, claims description in any account purporting to be complete. It is necessary to refer to the sufferings endured and the infamies practised in some detail, so that we may realise the true measure of the infinite misery they have caused. It is almost impossible to conceive of the horrors of that march of thousands of both sexes across a continent; ragged, debilitated men, weak women and helpless children, tramping on and on for a whole year or more, shoeless, insufficiently clad and subsisting on

the chance alms of the charitable; fed by a meagre pittance, lodged nightly in half-ruinous log prisons, or festering for weeks in detestable forwarding prisons. The Russian exile system has rivalled in its inflictions the cruelties and barbarities of the darkest ages.

By degrees changes in the penal code, multiplying offences punishable by exile, increased the numbers sent to Siberia. The colonisation and development of the new country claimed the attention of the government. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries increasing numbers were deported, but with no attempt at organised system and with the most callous neglect of the human beings driven forth like cattle along the dreary road. They were at all times abominably misused everywhere, harassed, whipped, starved, and treated worse than the four-footed beasts, which from their intrinsic value would have been worth a certain amount of care. Exile was substituted for the death penalty, and the families of the offender often accompanied him. The punishment was sometimes accorded for breaking laws and regulations that were most trivial and ridiculous. Among offences were included fortune-telling, prize-fighting, snuff-taking, and driving with reins — a culpable western innovation — for the Russian rode his draught horse then or ran beside it.

The demand for enforced labour steadily increased as Siberia's natural resources became more

and more evident. The discovery of mineral wealth, the rich silver mines of Nertchinsk in the Trans-Baikal, and the establishment of large manufactories at Irkutsk called for more exiles, and laws were passed extending the punishment. Any kind of misconduct led to deportation. Jews were exiled for failing to pay their taxes, serfs for cutting down trees without permission, and minor military offences were visited with this penalty. Large numbers took the road, but without the slightest organisation. There was no system; the exiles were driven in troops like cattle from town to town. No one knew exactly the cause of exile or could differentiate between individuals. Some were murderers and the most hardened offenders; some were simple peasants guilty of losing their passports or the victims of an oppressive proprietor. "The exile system," says Kennan, "was nothing but a chaos of disorder in which accident and caprice played almost equally important parts."

Two cases may be quoted here of the haphazard arbitrary treatment that commonly prevailed. A peasant who had innocently bought a stolen horse was sent to Siberia as an enforced colonist, but was not set at liberty on arrival. Through some error and confusion as to his identity, he was transported to the Berozev mines and worked there underground for three and twenty years. Again, the governor of Siberia, Traskin, of notoriously evil repute, having a spite against one of the councillors of the

State Chamber, banished him from the province of Irkutsk, with an order that he should never be permitted to remain more than ten days in the same place. The wretched man accordingly spent the rest of his life in aimless wanderings through Siberia.

With the nineteenth century some reforms were introduced. The exiles were organised in parties, marched under escorts, and *étapes*, or halting stations for a stay of a night or more, were built at regular intervals along the road. The identification and separate personality of individuals were established by means of proper papers showing whom they were, their history and destination. A great administrative measure was the creation in 1823 of a central bureau at Tobolsk (removed later to Tiumen) for the record and registration of all exiles arriving and passing into Siberia. Sub-offices at the principal Siberian towns assisted with the necessary details showing the distribution and disposal of all persons banished. Full statistics are consequently available for estimating accurately the extent of penal deportation in recent years. Approximately, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, more than a million souls have passed the boundary line between Europe and Asia. Speaking more exactly, the total number banished between 1823 and 1887 amounted to 772,979, or an annual average of about seventeen thousand.

Siberian exiles have been grouped by Kennan into

four great classes. These are as follows: the hard-labour convicts, in Russian called the *katorzhniki*; the penal colonists, or *poselenty*; the persons merely banished, the *ssylny*; women and children who go to Siberia voluntarily as the companions of fathers and parents, and conversely, in rare cases, men who accompany their wives. Members of this class are called *dobrovolny*. According to law, they are not under the disciplinary control of the escort, but, as a matter of fact, they are subjected to the same treatment as the convicts. An eye-witness reported in a Moscow paper in 1881 that when he met a party of exiles on the march, "the exhausted women and children literally stuck in the mud, and the soldiers dealt them blows to make them advance and keep pace with the rest."

Members of the two first classes wore chains, leg fetters, and walked in slippers for distances of six and seven thousand miles. The rest went free of such physical encumbrances, but were otherwise exposed to the terrible hardships and privations of the long protracted, wearisome march. The mere atmospheric conditions and extremes of temperature in the varying seasons suffice to break down the health of all but the most hardy, for winter succeeded summer before the march ended and vice versa, so that arctic cold alternated with tropical heat, and deep snow with burning sun and torrential rains. When to such exposure are superadded unsuitable clothing, bad and insufficient food, the

insanitary condition of the over-crowded *étapes* and the absence of medical care, "one is," Kennan says, "surprised, not that so many die, but that so many get through alive."

A Russian painter, M. Jacoby, has painted an awful picture depicting the frightful scene. It has been graphically described by Kropotkin and may be quoted here in full to give a clear idea of this hideous march.

"You see a marshy plain where the icy wind blows freely, driving before it the snow that begins to cover the frozen soil. Morasses with small shrubs or crumpled trees, bent down by wind or snow, spread as far as the eye can reach; the next village is twenty miles distant. Low mountains, covered with thick pine forests, mingling with the gray snow clouds, rise in the dust on the horizon. A track marked all along by poles to distinguish it from the surrounding plain, ploughed by the passage of thousands of carts, covered with ruts that keep down the hardest wheels, runs through the naked plains. The party slowly moves along this road. In front a row of soldiers opens the march. Behind them heavily advance the hard-labour convicts, with half-shaved heads, wearing gray clothes with a yellow diamond on the back, and open shoes worn out by the long journey, and exhibiting the tatters in which the wounded feet are wrapped. Each convict wears a chain riveted to his ankles, its rings being twisted with rags. The chain goes up each

leg and is suspended to a girdle. Another chain closely ties both hands and a third chain binds together six or eight convicts. Every false movement of any of the gang is felt by all his chain companions; the feebler is dragged forward by the stronger and he must not stop the way; the *étape* stage is long and the autumn day is short.

“Behind the hard-labour convicts march the *poselentsy*, condemned to be settled in Siberia, wearing the same gray clothes and the same kind of shoes. . . . In the rear you discover a few carts drawn by the small, attenuated, cat-like peasants’ horses. They are loaded with the bags of the convicts, and with the sick or dying who are fastened by ropes on the top of the load. Behind the carts struggle the wives and children of the convicts; a few have found a free corner on a loaded cart, and crouch there when unable to move further, whilst the great number march behind the carts, leading their children by the hand or bearing them in their arms. In the rear comes a second detachment of soldiers, stimulating these weak, feeble creatures to fresh exertions by blows with the butt end of their muskets.”

The infant mortality under these conditions almost exceeds belief, and deportation to Siberia has been aptly and truthfully described as a “massacre of the innocents.” In the year 1881, when 2,561 children followed the exile march, very few survived. The majority succumbed to the hardships

of the road and died before or immediately after their arrival at their destination. The yearly quota has constantly increased, numbering from five to eight thousand. To the danger to health incurred must be added the moral degradation, especially in the case of the young girls.

Before reviewing the conditions and setting forth the actual facts, with the processes that produced them, it will be well to dissect the grand totals and arrive at the relative proportions of the three principal classes composing the whole body of exiles constantly moving across the frontier to fill the prisons and to people Siberia to its uttermost ends. Less than one-half were criminal in the sense that they had committed offences and had been adjudged guilty in open court by duly constituted tribunals. The larger moiety had had no legal trial; they had been punished with banishment by the irresponsible action and simple fiat of minor officials and bodies of ill-educated peasants, wielding the extraordinary powers conferred by "administrative process." At no time and in no civilised land have people been so ruthlessly sacrificed and subjected to the forfeiture of personal liberty by this utter abnegation of justice and fair play, and the result is a standing disgrace to the government that permitted and encouraged it. The extent to which this most reprehensible system has obtained may be judged by a simple statement of figures. For many years past the average number sentenced to exile by legal verdict in

regular courts was 45.6 per cent. of the whole yearly contingent, and those banished by "administrative process" was 54.4 per cent. It must always be borne in mind that, in describing the methods pursued and the painful results attendant on them, more than half the sufferers were either entirely innocent or guilty of offences that could only be deemed criminal by a strained interpretation of the exercise of authority, and in no case had they been properly tried and convicted by law.

The system has been defined by Mr. Kennan as "the banishment of an obnoxious person from one part of the empire to another without the observance of any of the legal formalities which in most civilised countries precede the deprivation of rights and the restriction of personal liberty." A person might be entirely guiltless of any offence, he need not have made himself amenable to the law; it was enough that the local authorities should suspect him of being "untrustworthy"¹ or believe that his presence in any place was "prejudicial to public order," or threatened public tranquillity. He might be arrested forthwith and detained in prison for a period varying from two weeks to two years, and then by a stroke of the pen be deported, forcibly, to any part

¹The Russian word is "neblagonadiozhny" and means literally, "of whom nothing good can be expected," and the expression has been given a very wide interpretation. Young people who read certain forbidden books or join forbidden societies for the ventilation of certain principles are deemed untrustworthy.

of the empire and kept there under police surveillance for from one to ten years. He could not protest or seek to defend himself. The same impenetrable secrecy was maintained as in the dungeons of the Spanish Inquisition. Not a whisper reached him of the causes of his arrest; he might not examine the witnesses who accused him or supported the charge against him. He must not call upon friends to speak of his loyalty and good character; he was perfectly helpless and altogether at the mercy of the authorities, and even his nearest relatives were in ignorance of his whereabouts or what happened to him. They could not help him or must not if they would.

The power to send people into exile thus arbitrarily was vested in petty authorities, officers of *gendarmerie*, subordinate police officials, or mere executive orders countersigned by the minister of the interior and approved by the Czar. There is nothing new in this system. The people of Russia, from noble to serf, have never enjoyed the semblance of liberty; the Russian bureaucracy has wielded the unlimited power delegated to it by the autocratic Czar, and from the beginning of the eighteenth century twenty different classes of officials could employ "administrative methods" as a substitute for judicial process. The right was vested in governors, vice-governors, chiefs of police, and provincial bureaus, ecclesiastical authorities and landed proprietors. In addition to the power to send into exile,

these various authorities could at their discretion confiscate property, brand, inflict torture and flog with the knout. Village communes had also the power to order the removal by exile of members who were worthless and ill-conducted, of whom their fellows were anxious to get rid.

Innumerable cases of oppression and injustice are on record of which a few may be cited. One of the most flagrant was that of Constantine Staniovich, who was the son of a Russian admiral. He had been in the navy but had a fondness for literature and became a writer of plays and novels condemned by the censor as of "pernicious tendency." But he continued to write and finally became the proprietor of a magazine. He was seized without warning and locked up in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. His wife, who was at Baden Baden, heard nothing of his arrest, and found when she returned to St. Petersburg that he had mysteriously disappeared. She learned, after diligent inquiry, that he was in prison, and that his letters had been secretly tampered with, his offence being a correspondence through the post with a well-known Russian revolutionist residing in Switzerland. At length, after a long imprisonment, he was exiled by administrative process to Tomsk for three years. His magazine was discontinued by his absence and he was financially ruined. Neither wealth nor a high social position could save him from arbitrary treatment.

Another literary man, M. Berodin, was banished to Yakutsk, close to the Arctic Circle, because the manuscript of an article deemed " dangerous " was found in his house in St. Petersburg by the police. This was a spare copy of an article he had written for the *Annals of the Fatherland*, which had been accepted but had not appeared. When he was on his way to Eastern Siberia to expiate this horrible offence, the incriminated article was passed by the censor and actually published without objection in the same magazine, and without the alteration or omission of a single line. The exile read his own article, for which he had suffered, in the far-off place of his confinement.

The most monstrous instances of high handed proceedings are recorded. One unfortunate gentleman was exiled because he was suspected of an intention to put himself in an illegal situation, no more than a projected change of name. Another man was exiled and sent to Siberia because he was the friend of an accused person who was waiting trial on a political charge, and of which he was in due course acquitted. But the friend of this innocent man was deemed an offender, and was sent across the frontier. Such was the chaos of injustice, accident and caprice, that errors were constantly made as to identification. When the roll of a travelling party was called, no one answered to the name of Vladimir Sidoski. A Victor Sidoski was in the ranks and was challenged to answer.

"It is not my name. I am another man, I ought not to have been arrested; I am Victor, not Vladimir," was the answer. "You will do quite as well," retorted the officer. "I shall correct the name in the list." And Victor the innocent became Vladimir the prisoner. It sometimes happened that an arrest was made by mistake; the wrong man was taken and it was clearly shown, but no release followed. It was unsafe to take up the case of any victims of misuse. One lady who resented acts of manifest injustice was arrested and banished because "it was no business of hers."

A young and skilful surgeon, Dr. Bieli, was shamefully ill-treated. Two women students at a medical college in St. Petersburg had been expelled on suspicion of "untrustworthiness," and being anxious to continue their studies, had remained in the capital and had secretly become the doctor's pupils. They were without passports in an "illegal" position and should have been handed over to the police. But Dr. Bieli shielded them until their visits to his house, generally at night, attracted the attention of the police, and it was thought that some political conspiracy was in progress. Arrests followed, the fatal truth came out, and Dr. Bieli was exiled to the arctic village of Vorkhoyansk. His wife was expecting her confinement and could not go with him, but travelled after him, starting on a journey of six thousand miles to be made in the rough jolting *telyegas* and enduring endless hard-

ships. Her health broke down and gradually her mind gave way. But she bore up until the end of her trials seemed near, when she learned that a mistake had occurred in the place of her destination and that she must traverse another three thousand miles before she reached her husband. The sudden shock was fatal; she became violently insane and died a few months later in the prison hospital at Irkutsk.

The measure of administrative process has been defended by intelligent Russians who visit the blame upon the Nihilists and terrorists, — “a band so horribly vile that their crimes are beyond parallel.” A writer in a German periodical justifies this language by denouncing the bloodthirsty recklessness of the revolutionists who have not hesitated to use the assassin’s knife and dynamite bombs. To give local authorities power to banish the suspected was essential as a means of precaution, “the only possible means to counteract the nefarious doings of these dark conspirators.” Admitting, however, that the decision was unfortunate and has caused unspeakable misery, he says: “From the day this power was delegated no man knows at what moment he may not be seized and cast into prison or doomed to exile.”

He casts all the responsibility on the revolutionists, but in doing so, as Kennan says, puts the cart before the horse. Terrorist measures were the reply to grievous oppression. “It was administra-

tive exile, administrative caprice, and the absence of orderly and legal methods in political cases that caused terrorism, not terrorism that necessitated official lawlessness." Already the true facts are patent and thoroughly understood by the world at large. The so-called excesses of the revolutionists have not been committed, as the champions of the Russian government would have us believe, "by bloodthirsty tigers in human form at the prompting of presumptuous fancies," but "by ordinary men and women exasperated to the pitch of desperation by administrative suppression of free speech and free thought, administrative imprisonment for years upon suspicion, administrative banishment to the arctic regions without trial, and, to crown all, administrative denial of every legal remedy and every peaceful means of redress."

Already "the whirligig of time has brought its revenges." Russia is wading through blood to the still far-off horizon which is at last dawning on a vexed and tortured people. The overthrow of despotism is approaching inevitably if slowly. The will of the people cannot be ignored or their aspirations checked and crushed by the old arbitrary methods of repression and coercion.

A whole volume might be filled with the detailed iniquities of the administrative process, which was so largely operative and so long before the oppressed people were goaded into retaliation. As far back as the early decades of the nineteenth century, sta-

tistics were gathered by a careful and industrious writer covering the period between 1827 and 1846 and showing the average number banished annually to be between three and six thousand, and the aggregate for the twenty years to be nearly eighty thousand. Beyond doubt in more recent years the numbers have steadily grown, although the exact figures are not available.

Kropotkin ably summarises the objects of exile: "Students and girls suspected of subversive ideas; writers whom it was impossible to prosecute for their writings, but who were known to be imbued with a 'dangerous spirit;' workmen who were known to have spoken against the authorities; persons who have been irreverent to some governor of a province or *ispravnik* were transported by hundreds every year." The barest denunciation and the most casual suggestion were sufficient to afford a motive.

Several young girls were condemned, not merely to exile, but to hard labour for from six to eight years for having given a socialistic pamphlet to one workman. A child of fourteen became a penal colonist for shouting aloud that it was a shame to condemn people to death for nothing.

A flagrant case was that of M. Annenkov, a landed proprietor, who proposed the health of the governor at a banquet given him by the nobility of Kursk. At the end he was bold enough to remark that he greatly hoped his excellency would devote

more time to the affairs of the province. The following week a *tarantas* containing two gendarmes stopped at his door; he was arrested, was forbidden to bid his wife farewell, and was conveyed as a prisoner to a distant part. Only after six months and the most urgent representations of influential friends was he again set free.

In the last decade of the reign of Alexander II, between 1870 and 1880, administrative exile was employed with unprecedented recklessness and the most consummate indifference to personal rights. Unlimited discretionary powers were vested in governors of provinces. General Todleben, in Odessa, banished all of the "untrustworthy" class without inquiry or discrimination, and sent into exile every one whose loyalty to the existing government was even doubtful. It was enough to be registered as a "suspect" on the books of the secret police, or to have been accused, even anonymously, of political disaffection. Parents who had the most honourable record of unblemished loyalty were exiled because their children had become revolutionists; school-boys were exiled because they were acquainted with some of the disaffected and had failed to report the fact to the police; teachers were exiled for circulating copies of a harmless magazine; members of provincial assemblies, who claimed the right to petition the Czar for redress of grievances, were sent across the frontier; and university students, who had been tried and acquitted of a political offence,

were re-arrested and exiled by administrative process, — all in violation of the most elementary principles of justice.

The majority of the administrative exiles were political prisoners, but all politicals were not let off with simple banishment. A considerable number of political offenders were sentenced to hard labour and also to penal exile. They did not live apart but were incorporated with the common-law criminals and subjected to precisely the same irksome treatment; they were equally deprived of civil rights, and could never count upon freedom absolute and unconditional. A few might in the long run be allowed to return to European Russia, at the intercession and with the guarantee of influential friends, but endless exile was generally their portion and a hard hand-to-mouth existence, with unceasing struggles to gain bread, for when nominally free they are still under police surveillance and do not easily find the means of a livelihood. They are worse off than when prisoners, for they are granted no government allowance and must fight for every kopeck under many disadvantages.

We come thus to the large class of the *ssylny*, those simply banished, whose liberty is forfeited, although they are not actually subjected to imprisonment; and with them must be comprised the emancipists, those who have completed their penalty but are not permitted to leave Siberia. Both classes are practically prisoners, although not within four walls

perhaps. Their movements are restricted, and they are still held under observation within a certain area and must observe certain stringent rules of conduct. Their condition is only a modified form of imprisonment applicable to at least half of the entire number transported to Siberia.

A code of rules has been drawn up for all whom the law condemns to exile and enforced domicile, whether at home or in far-off Siberia. The pregnant word "banishment" is carefully excluded from these rules, and police surveillance takes effect on those "assigned to definite places of residence," an expression euphemistically applied to the wildest and most remote regions of the empire. It is an obviously colourable suppression of true facts. The names of such places as the frontiers of Mongolia, the arctic province of Yakutsk, or the sub-tropical mountain districts of Central Asia are never mentioned, but there can be no mistakes as to the irksome character of the rules. It is a life of suffering, of sometimes open arrest, and often of rigorously curtailed freedom of movement. The exile must remain where he is planted; to move his quarters he must give notice and obtain the consent of the police, to whom he must constantly report himself. His chosen place of residence is liable to visitation and search at any time of the day or night, and anything it contains may be removed; his correspondence, all letters and telegrams, inward and outward, may be read or withheld at all times.

The manner of the exile's daily life is laid down with great minuteness, and the nature of his employments specified, chiefly in the negative sense. He cannot hold any position in the service of the state; he must do no clerical work for any society or institution; he must not promote, or serve with any company; he cannot act as curator of any museum; he must not give lectures or impart instruction as a schoolmaster; he must not take any part in any theatricals, and is forbidden generally to exercise any public activity. He may not embark in any photographic or literary occupation; may not deal in books, must not keep a tea house or grog shop, or trade in intoxicating liquors. He shall not appear or plead in court except on behalf of himself and his near relations, nor without special permission may he act as physician, accoucheur, apothecary or chemist. The penalty of contravening any of these regulations is imprisonment for terms varying from three days to one month. Exiles without means are granted a meagre allowance from the treasury, but it is withdrawn if they fail to obtain employment through bad conduct or laziness. The difficulty of getting a living under so many restrictions is not considered.

The exile's life is full of irksome conditions. When, after a nearly interminable journey, he reaches his "definite domicile," he must find his own residence with some reluctant householder who does not care to shelter a presumably dangerous political,

subject at all times of the day or night to police visitation; and, moreover, the householder is expected to spy upon his tenant and report any suspicious circumstance. When at length he overcomes these irritating and causeless objections and rents a bare room, he has to settle the question of daily subsistence. His wife and family he has left behind in Russia, probably destitute, while he is here in Siberia without means, and with little hope of being able to secure them. He falls back on the government grant, no more than twelve shillings a month, and finds that it is utterly insufficient to provide him with the commonest necessities of life. Rent, coarse food, meat, rye flour, a few eggs, "brick" tea and a little cheap tobacco exhaust his allowance and leave a substantial deficit, and this without spending a kopeck on washing, kerosene or medicine.

Naturally the exile seeks to supplement his inadequate income. His position is nearly hopeless. Possibly he has had the best education, is a graduate of the university, knows several languages, and is a skilful surgeon or practised physician. He does not, of course, expect to find in the wilds of Siberia as many openings for his trained intelligence as in St. Petersburg or Moscow, but surely there is room for an expert penman, a good accountant, a competent teacher, a fair musician? Yet he seems to have no chance to earn a few rubles, a few kopecks even, day by day. The regulations, quoted

above, close every avenue, debar him from every employment but ordinary manual labour. He has never learned any handicraft; he cannot work as carpenter, shoemaker, wheelwright or blacksmith; he has no capital and cannot go into trade; he must not engage himself as driver or teamster, for he cannot leave the village to which he has been assigned. There is nothing left for him except to dig, but there is not an inch of land for him to cultivate. All the ground in the neighbourhood belongs to the village commune and has been already allotted to its members, so that any available land is so far distant that he would risk arrest by going there.

In this dilemma he petitions the government to relieve him of his restrictions, and permit him to engage in such a harmless vocation as teaching music, but he is referred to the rule forbidding it. To this refusal was once added the cruel suggestion that the starving and impecunious convict might hire himself out as a labourer to the king, his peasant, for half a dozen kopecks a day. The same answer was given to a petition from some political prisoners who begged to be allowed to occupy and cultivate a tract of government ground near their village.

It was dangerous to protest against ill-usage. A number of exiles, goaded to desperation by brutal severity of the acting governor of the province of Tobolsk, respectfully declared that there was a limit to human endurance and that their position

had become intolerable. This petition was adjudged "audaciously impudent" and its authors, nineteen in number, were removed to a barren village within the Arctic Circle. Memorials from free and independent bodies were equally unpalatable to the authorities. The medical society of Tver in European Russia, a short distance from Moscow, dared to back up a request made by a number of qualified physicians exiled to Siberia to be allowed to practise in the places of their banishment. A year or two before, the governor-general of Eastern Siberia had reported to the Czar that the number of doctors in the country was utterly insufficient, saying, "In the cities only is it possible to take measures for the preservation of health. In every other part of Eastern Siberia physicians are almost wholly lacking, and the local population is left helpless in its struggle with diphtheria and other contagious diseases which desolate the country." Two years later the medical school of Tver was swiftly punished for venturing to endorse this statement, and for daring to ask that the prohibition to practise might be rescinded in the case of the doctors so urgently needed. The school was forthwith broken up and two of its members who were in state services were summarily dismissed from their posts.

Exiled physicians who dared to infringe the rules were mercilessly dealt with. A student named Dolgopolov had been banished for a most trifling offence. During a riot at the Kharkov university,

when the streets were being cleared by the mounted Cossacks with their heavy dog-whips, Dolgopolov indignantly took the brutal horsemen to task. For this he was promptly arrested and banished by administrative process to Western Siberia. Here, at the earnest entreaty of two suffering fellow creatures, one ill with typhus fever, and the other afflicted with cataract, he ventured to prescribe for them. He was immediately summoned before the chief of police, who had a personal grudge against him, and roughly reminded him he had transgressed the regulations. A little later he was called in to attend the major's wife who had been accidentally shot in the leg by her son. The immediate extraction of the bullet was essential, and no one but Dolgopolov was competent to perform the operation. He explained that he was forbidden to practise under pain of imprisonment, but it was put to him as a matter of life and death, and he at last consented. The next day he was arrested by order of the *ispravnik* and thrown into prison at Tiukalinsk, where he contracted typhus fever. His case excited profound sympathy in the town, which was magnified by the authorities into a charge of exercising a pernicious and dangerous influence, and was so reported to the governor, who immediately ordered his removal to the arctic town of Surgut. No mention had been made of his illness, but the convoy officer refused to receive him. As the *ispravnik* would not be balked, however, he ob-

tained a peasant's cart, dragged the patient from his bed in hospital and sent him away in his night-shirt under the escort of two policemen.

He arrived at Ishim after 126 miles en route. Other political exiles who resided here rallied around him, had him examined by the local surgeon, and got the local chief of police to draw up a statement and telegraph it to the governor, who heard for the first time of the sufferer's dangerous illness, and who replied by ordering him to be taken into the local hospital. It was currently reported that the governor took a substantial bribe from the *ispravnik* at Tiukalinsk for sparing him the prosecution he richly merited. Dr. Dolgoplov gradually recovered and was later sent to Surgut. The Siberian *ispravniks*, or chiefs of police, were notorious offenders, and Kennan says that at the time of his journey there were ten under accusation of criminal charges but still evading trial by timely propitiation, in cash, of their superiors.

Police surveillance was the more difficult to bear because a large number of the officials who carried out this duty were degraded characters with criminal antecedents. Many had been originally common-law exiles taken into the government service at the expiration of their terms. Kennan states that he came across police officers whom he would not dare to meet at night, when alone and unarmed. He records that in the city of Tomsk the police had been constantly guilty of "acts of violence, out-

rage and crime, including the arrest and imprisonment of innocent citizens by the hundreds, the taking of bribes from notorious criminals, the subornation of perjury, the use of torture and the beating nearly to death of pregnant women." A newly appointed governor, on visiting a prison, heard three hundred complaints of unjust imprisonment, and on investigation of them two hundred prisoners were set at liberty. The methods of surveillance were unceremonious and rudely intrusive. An exile wrote to the press as follows, complaining that the police entered his quarters repeatedly to verify his presence and to see if any one else was there. "They walk past our houses constantly, looking in at the windows and listening at the doors. They post sentries at night on the corners of the streets where we reside, and they compel our neighbours to watch our movements and report upon them to the local authorities."

Many ladies were to be found among the political exiles, often defenceless girls from sixteen to twenty years of age and young married women temporarily separated from their husbands who were interned elsewhere or were at hard labour in the mines. They were constantly exposed to indignity or worse, suffered insult or outrage, and were compelled to associate with others for common protection. One young woman, on returning from a short walk, found that a police officer had invaded her private apartment and was lying asleep in helmet

and boots upon her bed. The chief of police also shamelessly misused his control of the exiles' correspondence, which was absolute; he might at his discretion suppress and destroy any letters after perusal of their contents, or detain them and postpone delivery on the ground that they were in secret cipher which he was anxious to penetrate. Sometimes he carried them to his club and read them aloud between drinks to his boon companions, who laughed brutally at the tender messages contained in them.

It must be admitted that the fate of those merely banished is stern enough and their condition is in some respects worse than that of the actually imprisoned. Loss of liberty is a terrible punishment, of course, but at least food and lodging are provided and, as has been shown, the simple exile is not certainly assured of either. There are phases of exile, too, which far transcend the worst form of incarceration. Banishment to a *ulus* or *yurt* of the arctic province of Yakutsk is the most barbarous penalty that could well be devised for the prolonged torture of a civilised being. The province of Yakutsk is very sparsely inhabited, the climate is arctic, the post arrives rarely and at long intervals; common necessities, not to say luxuries, such as tea, sugar, petroleum, are unprocurable. Even stale black bread can seldom be obtained and at an exorbitant price. The native's hut, or *yurt*, is tent-shaped and built of rough logs, the interstices filled up with

earth and turf. The life of an exile there has been stigmatised as a "living death," and a description by a writer in the *Russian Gazette* is quoted.

"The Cossacks who brought me from the town of Yakutsk to my destination soon returned, and I was left alone among the Yakuts who do not understand a word of Russian. They watch me constantly, for fear that if I escape they will have to answer for it to the Russian authorities. If I go out of the close atmosphere of the solitary *yurt* to walk I am followed by a suspicious Yakut. If I take an axe to cut myself a cane, the Yakut directs me by gestures and pantomime to let it alone and go back into the *yurt*. I return thither, and before the fireplace I see a Yakut who has stripped himself naked, and is hunting for lice in his clothing — a pleasant picture! The Yakuts live in winter in the same buildings with their cattle, and frequently are not separated from the latter even by the thinnest partition. The excrement of the cattle and of the children; the inconceivable disorder and filth; the rotting straw and rags; the myriads of vermin in the bedding; the foul, oppressive air, and the impossibility of speaking a word of Russian — all these things taken together are positively enough to drive one insane. The food of the Yakuts can hardly be eaten. It is carelessly prepared, without salt, often of tainted materials, and the unaccustomed stomach rejects it with nausea. I have no separate dishes or clothing of my own; there are

no facilities for bathing, and during the whole winter — eight months — I am as dirty as a Yakut. I cannot go anywhere — least of all to the town, which is two hundred versts away. I live with the Yakuts by turns — staying with one family for six weeks, and then going for the same length of time to another. I have nothing to read, neither books nor newspapers, and I know nothing of what is going on in the world."

The editor of the *Russian Gazette*, M. S. A. Priklonsky, an eminent publicist and man of letters, in commenting upon this state of things writes, "Beyond this severity cannot go. Beyond this there remains nothing but to tie a man to the tail of a wild horse, and drive him into the steppe, or chain him to a corpse and leave him to his fate. One does not wish to believe that a human being can be subjected, without trial and by a mere executive order, to such grievous torment. . . . And yet we are assured . . . that up to this time none of the exiles in the province of Yakutsk have been granted any alleviating privileges."

Mr. Kennan bears witness in 1891 that exiles were still sent to Yakutsk, and Leo Deutsch speaks of the practice as still prevailing much later, although he and his colleagues did not shrink from removal there, hoping it might lead to some more advantageous change later. But humanity shudders at the detestable treatment of the poor people whose worst crime was a passionate desire to alle-

viate the sufferings of their fellow countrymen. Life at Yakutsk was infinitely more terrible than the worst tortures inflicted by prolonged confinement in a separate cell, which is commonly described as "the greatest crime of the nineteenth century."

CHAPTER IV

THE OSTROG AT OMSK

Centre of exile system at Omsk — Dostoyevski — His famous book "Recollections of the Dead House" based on his experiences in this Ostrog — Description of the prison and its heterogeneous inmates — Detestable character of an ex-noble — His attempted escape with another convict — Another well-born criminal of very different character — His industry and skill with his hands — The prison routine — Food — Extra delicacies could be obtained — Passion for gambling — Various devices for indulging it — Method of smuggling strong drink into the Ostrog — Drunken carousals — Gazin, the vodka seller — His history and atrocious crimes — Dostoyevski narrowly escapes being murdered by him.

IN the early decades of the nineteenth century the exile system centred chiefly at Omsk, an ancient military post situated on the junction of the rivers Om and Irtysh. A place of arms had been erected here in 1719 to strengthen the Russian dominion among the nomads of the Asiatic Steppes. This was replaced by a formidable fortress and became a chief post on the Siberian boundary line. A large town sprang up around it, which grew into the headquarters of local administration, and was long the residence of the governor-general of Western Siberia.

Just outside the ramparts of the fortress stood a wooden prison, enclosed by a high stockade, which has an interesting penal history, having served for long years as a base and starting point for the convict exiles on their eastward march. The prison population constantly numbered about eight hundred and it was the place of durance for several remarkable prisoners. One of the greatest of Russian novelists, Dostoyevski, based his famous book, "Reminiscences of the Dead House" on his personal experiences in this old *ostrog*.¹ He was one of the early "politicals" who were subjected to the same régime as the common-law prisoner or ordinary gaol-bird, and he suffered four years as a hard-labour convict at Omsk. His offence was being involved in the Petrachevski affair in 1849, and with him in Omsk was the poet Dirov, who suffered a like term of four years for the same reason.

Dostoyevski's treatment, having regard to his offence, was a disgrace to civilisation, and it is satisfactory to know that intelligent Russian officials to-day are heartily ashamed of the episode. A full account of its enormities has been since written by

¹ The *ostrog* was the name given to the stockaded entrenchment or rude fort built by the Cossack invaders of Siberia in the old days. As prisoners were confined more and more in these forts, the word *ostrog* came to define a place of durance, and is now applied to all local prisons in Siberia, and provincial lock-ups. The prison had disappeared when Kennan looked for it on his visit to Omsk. New buildings have been erected on the site.

a fellow prisoner named Rozhnovski, and was published in the Tiflis newspaper, *Kavkaz*. He was at the mercy of harsh taskmasters, endured the severest discipline, wore irons always and the prisoners' dress, and was twice flogged. The first corporal punishment he received was for complaining in the name of the other prisoners of filthy foreign matter floating in the daily soup, and the second was for saving the life of a comrade from drowning, in direct defiance of his officer's order to do nothing of the kind. The second "execution" was so terrible that the victim was taken up for dead; he lay insensible for so long that he was afterward nicknamed the "deceased."

Never have the inner life and history of a Russian prison of that epoch — the middle of the nineteenth century — been so thoroughly explored and exposed as by the gifted writer, Dostoyevski. He draws on his own experience, speaking at first hand from his personal knowledge. He knew exactly what imprisonment meant, for he had been through it, constantly subjected to its irksome restraints and almost intolerable conditions. He had learned to habituate himself to its laws and penalties; to endure the most acute discomforts; to face with patient resignation the endless vista of the slow moving years, continually tortured and tormented by suffering and the complete absence of all that tends to brighten life and make it bearable. He had ample opportunities for studying and observing the

convicts with whom he was so long obliged to consort. He draws them with photographic exactitude. He observed, and has effectively reproduced their traits, thoughts, feelings and inner nature. He saw them at their best and at their worst; he noted the generous emotions that sometimes swayed them, the evil passions that more often possessed them. He can do justice to the sympathy and compassion lavished on suffering comrades and reprobates; to the envy, hatred and uncharitableness constantly exhibited when moved by jealousy or consumed with temper and overmastering desire for revenge. The daily life of a Siberian place of durance at that time is brought before us with striking force: its generally wearisome monotony, to which severe toil is a welcome break; the petty, pitiful recreations enjoyed often at the risk of punishment; the vices of drunkenness and gambling, strictly forbidden although constantly indulged in; the gormandising at Christmas and other festivals. He describes the ambitious theatrical entertainment given in the convict barrack room, when the convicts, despite the difficulties raised by discipline and the dearth of means, produced a striking performance.

The old prison at Omsk was situated at the end of the citadel just under the ramparts. It was surrounded by a high palisade of stakes buried deep in the ground, enclosing a court-yard two hundred feet long by one hundred and fifty feet broad. A great gate in the stockade guarded by sentries gave

admission to the prison. Looking through the interstices of the palisades from within, a narrow glimpse was obtained of the glacis of the fort sloping downward, and of a little corner of the sky above. The prison buildings consisted of a number of log huts of one story, each providing a separate barrack to accommodate roughly about two hundred convicts herded together in very close association. This was long before the extension of the cellular system to Russia, and the terrors of isolated confinement did not exist in those days. But life in common had its peculiar horrors, which our author enlarges upon. "I could not," he says, "possibly have conjured up the poignant and terrible suffering of never being alone, even for one minute, during ten years. Working always under surveillance in the barracks, ever in the unvarying companionship of two hundred others; never alone, never! This enforced cohabitation was the sharpest and most painful sensation endured. Nowhere is it so horrible as in a prison, where the society must contain many with whom no one would willingly live.

"Among them were murderers by imprudence and murderers by profession, simple thieves and chiefs of thieves, masters in the art of finding money in the pockets of a passer-by or of lifting anything, no matter what, from the table. . . . The majority were depraved and perverted, so that calumnies and scandal rained among them like hail. Our life was a constant hell, a perpetual damnation. . . . Those

who were not already corrupt on reception soon became so. Intrigues, calumnies, scandalous back-biting of all kinds, envy and hatred reigned above everything else. No ordinary tongue could hold its own against these adepts at abuse with insults constantly in their mouths."

A curious trait in this heterogeneous assembly, in which the elements of evil predominated, was the reticence of the convicts. Some were malefactors of the worst kind, veterans in habitual crime, guilty of the most atrocious misdeeds, but they would not talk of them. On one occasion in the barrack room a miscreant who had killed and cut up a child of five began to relate the horrible details; how he had tempted the little one with a toy, inveigled it into a private place, and there used his murderous knife. He was one of the licensed buffoons of the establishment, who as a rule found a ready audience, but he was now received with one unanimous cry of indignant disgust; and he was shamed into silence. It was contrary to the unwritten law of the prison to speak of such things.

Another case was that of a parricide, a young man of noble birth who had filled the post of a public functionary. A wastrel, a spendthrift and a reckless gambler, he had been a cause of constant annoyance to his father, who remonstrated with him in vain. The son had reason to believe that he would inherit a substantial sum from his father, so he killed him in order to come into the estate

more quickly and thus continue his debaucheries. Presently the corpse was unearthed from a drain; the head had been severed and placed on a cushion beside the body. The parricide's crime was brought home to him, he was tried and convicted, degraded and deprived of his privileges, and sentenced to twenty years' hard labour. At the *ostrog* he was despised by his fellow convicts because he was shameless and permitted himself to talk lightly of his crime. He sometimes spoke of his father with extraordinary callousness, and once, in boasting of the hereditary good health of his family, quietly remarked, "My father, for example, never was ill until the day of his death" — by the hand of his unnatural son.¹

This animal insensibility carried so far was no doubt phenomenal. It showed an organic defect in the man's nature, but conscience still lurked in its lowest depths, and there were times when he was vexed and tormented by great agitation in his sleep, when he cried aloud, "Hold him! Cut off his head!" Outwardly, in his waking hours, he never showed the slightest signs of remorse or repentance, and this is characteristic of the great bulk

¹In the latter part of his book Dostoyevski corrects this early account of the supposed parricide, and tells us that it was all a mistake. It was a grave case of judicial error. The convict, when he had served ten years' imprisonment, was proved to be entirely innocent. When the real murderers had been discovered and had confessed their crime, the wronged man was set at liberty.

of criminals. Dostoyevski avers that in all the years he mixed with them he never noticed even the most fugitive indication of regret or moral compunction for crimes committed. "The criminal," he adds, "who has revolted against society, hates it, and considers himself in the right; society was wrong, not he. Is he not, moreover, undergoing his punishment? Accordingly, he is absolved, acquitted in his own eyes."

Most convicts exhibited similar personal traits. A few showed a gay, frivolous demeanour, which drew down on them the unmixed contempt of their fellows; the larger number were morose, envious, inordinately vain, presumptuous, susceptible and excessively ceremonious. Their first endeavour was to bear themselves with dignity; to submit to discipline and obey the rules, but with self-respect, so long as they were enforced fairly and reasonably. Established usage had great weight, almost as much as official regulations. Every new arrival was soon brought into line and found his level with the rest. A man at first reception might seek to show off and astonish his fellows by bold talk and loud threats, but it was all wasted breath; he soon yielded submission, willingly or unwillingly, unconsciously perhaps, to the predominant tone of the place.

Class distinctions were not ignored in this Russian *ostrog*, but convicts of noble birth, of title even, and educated as gentlemen, had an especially hard

time. In English prisons such persons receive a certain consideration from their fellows, are addressed civilly and treated with some respect. At Omsk they were cordially disliked and subjected to many annoyances. There were some half-dozen, like Dostoyevski, of noble rank, who had been degraded from their position and were looked down upon and despised by the other convicts, who would not admit them as members of their class. A gibe commonly heard was, "Ah, Monsieur's carriage once drove people in the street; now Monsieur picks hemp." Their comrades were aware of their peculiar sufferings and made sport of them. "It was above all when we were working together," declares Dostoyevski, "that we had most to endure, for our strength was not equal to theirs and we were seldom of much use at labour. Nothing is more difficult than to gain the confidence of the common people; above all such people as these!"

The unequal effect of the punishment was very marked in the *ostrog*. "A common man," says our author, "sent to hard labour, finds himself in kindred society, perhaps even in a more interesting society than he has known. He loses his native place and his family, but his ordinary surroundings are much the same as before. A man of education, condemned by law to the same punishment as the common man, suffers incomparably more. He must stifle all his needs, all his habits; he must descend into a lower sphere, must breathe another air. He

is like a fish thrown upon the sand. The punishment he undergoes, nominally equal for all criminals according to law, is ten times more painful and more severe for him than for the common man. This is an incontestable truth, even if one thinks only of the material habits that must be sacrificed."

The principle holds good in penal codes everywhere. As a general rule, there is no differentiating treatment, no regard for antecedent conditions of rank, position, or education, and it is argued, no doubt rightly, that the offender of the better class knows better and has no excuse for lapsing into crime. When he falls, it is under the impulse of irresistible evil nature, and his misdeeds will rival the worst. There were five ex-nobles at Omsk, and the majority, three at least, were incorrigible blackguards, criminal to the backbone. Dostoyevski sketches their portraits in a few incisive strokes and in the blackest colours. One was a man who offered the most repulsive example of degradation and baseness to which he may fall whose feeling of honour has perished within him. This youth acted as spy and informer for the governor, to whom, by the intermediary of a servant, he repeated all that was said and done in the prison. It was a base trade which he had adopted when at large in St. Petersburg and before he had completed his studies. Being short of funds, he sold himself to the police authorities after a quarrel with his parents, and

betrayed a number of associates to obtain the means for satisfying the grossest and most licentious desires. At last, moved by insatiable greed, he joined in a mad plot which he should have seen was hopeless, for he was not without intelligence, and was arrested, tried and condemned to ten years as a hard-labour convict in Siberia. He accepted his fate without repining; he could fall no lower, and as a convict he might perpetrate any villainies without shame or compunction.

"I think of this disgusting creature," says Dostoyevski, "as of some monstrous phenomenon. During the many years I lived in the midst of murderers, debauchees and proved rascals, never in my life did I meet a case of such complete moral debasement, determined corruption and shameless turpitude. . . . To me he was never more than a piece of flesh furnished with teeth and a stomach, greedy for the most offensive and ferocious animal enjoyments, and ready to assassinate anyone to compass them. He was a perfect monster, a mere animal restrained by no feelings, no rules of conduct. . . . Fire, plague, famine, no matter what scourge, is preferable to the presence of such a man in human society. . . . The common-law convicts maintained friendly relations with him and were more affable with him than with us. They thought nothing of his base actions; espionage and denunciation were in the air as natural products of the place, and the kindly attitude of the authorities, whose creature

he was, gave him importance and a certain value in the eyes of his fellows. . . . He poisoned the first days of my imprisonment and drove me nearly to despair. I was terrified by the mass of baseness and cowardice into which I had been thrown. I imagined that every one else was as foul and contemptible as he."

Some years later this man was the hero in an escape from the prison which caused considerable commotion at the time. A change had come over his circumstances, for his patron and protector, the major for whom he acted as spy, had left the prison, and his palmy days were a thing of the past. He then spent his time in forging passports, but pined for more remunerative employment, and at last resolved to make a bold stroke for freedom. He allied himself with another convict named Kulikov, a man of active, enterprising character, full of strength and self-reliance, who calculated the chances coolly and was prepared to take any risks to get away from the prison and lead his own life outside. They were well suited to each other, equally bold and determined, equally intelligent and cunning.

Their first step was to seduce a soldier to assist them in their flight. According to the rules, convicts were never suffered to go about without an escort of one or more soldiers, but thus attended they might leave the prison precincts and enter the town. The man selected for an escort was a

Pole who had been in trouble, and had served in one of the disciplinary companies, but had at length rejoined his battalion, in which he rose to the rank of corporal. He was a prey to home-sickness in an acute form, and was prepared to risk much to return to his native country. He was quite willing to further the plans of the intending fugitives, and managed to form with them part of a force detailed to execute some repairs at a distant military barrack at that time empty of troops. In the middle of the job, the corporal took off his two prisoners, ostensibly to fetch some tools from another shop. Kulikov, with a wink, added that he would bring back some vodka, but the liquor never arrived nor the prisoners. They had gone into the town to a secure hiding place, where they changed their clothes and got rid of their irons and lay by waiting for a quiet moment to escape after the first excitement had blown over.

Their disappearance was not realised for some hours. The hue and cry was then raised and a thorough search instituted. The authorities were most unhappy, for stringent regulations had been neglected; the convicts should have been guarded by at least two men apiece and not allowed to come and go as they pleased. Inside the prison everything was turned upside down, and the prisoners were repeatedly searched and cross-questioned. The guards were doubled in the prison and beyond it, expresses were despatched to all police stations

around, and mounted Cossacks beat up all the surrounding country. It was comparatively open ground; the forests were at some distance and no cover was at hand. At the end of a week the prison-breakers were recaptured in a village only seventy versts distant, and were brought back to the *ostrog*, chained hand and foot. Severe flogging was the certain retribution for attempted escape; Kulikov was adjudged by a court-martial to suffer fifteen hundred lashes, and the originator of the plot five hundred, but as he was consumptive, he was excused from a portion of the punishment by the doctor of the prison.

Another well-born convict was of a character so different that he merits a detailed description. His name was Akim Akimych, and he had been an officer who, when serving as a sub-lieutenant in the Caucasus, had put a small tributary prince to death. He was in command of a petty fort in the mountains, and his neighbour, the prince, made a night attack upon it, meaning to burn it about his ears, but the enterprise failed. Akimych pretended not to be aware of his real assailant, and invited the prince to come and pay him a friendly visit. A great show was made; the garrison was paraded and the guest royally entertained. After dinner Akimych took the prince severely to task, reproached him with his treachery, and shot him. He at once reported this summary action to his superior officer, who placed him under arrest and

brought him to trial by court-martial, which sentenced him to death; but the penalty was commuted to twelve years' imprisonment in Siberia. He bowed submissively to his hard fate, but defended his conduct. "The prince had tried to burn my fort. What was I to do? Was I to thank him for it?" he asked pertinently.

Akimych was a strange medley of opposite qualities. In aspect tall and much emaciated, in temper obstinate, and not very well educated, he was excessively argumentative and particular about the accuracy of details. He was very excitable, very quarrelsome, easily offended and most sensitive. The other convicts, who generally despised the nobles, laughed at him when not afraid of him, and he claimed at once a footing of perfect equality with them, which he maintained by insulting them, calling them thieves and vagabonds and, if necessary, beating them. He had a keen appreciation of justice and fair play and would interfere in anything he thought unjustifiable, whether it concerned him or not. He was esteemed for his straightforward ways and not a little for his cleverness and skill with his fingers.

Akimych could do almost anything; he was an adept at all trades, was a good cobbler and boot-maker, an excellent locksmith, a painter, and a carver and gilder. These trades he had acquired in the prison by merely watching and imitating his fellow workmen. One handicraft at which he la-

boured assiduously was the making of variegated paper lanterns, which he sold at a good price in the town, from where orders came in abundance. He also manufactured baskets and toys, so that he was never without money, which he spent in the purchase of shirts, pillows, tea and extra food. Akimych laboured methodically and regularly until a late hour in the night, and then put away his tools, unfolded his mattress, repeated his prayers and turned in to sleep the sleep of the just.

After the night closing, the interior of the barrack became a hive of industry. It looked like a large workshop. Strictly speaking, private labour was not permitted, but this was winked at as the only means of keeping the convicts quiet during the long hours of a winter's evening. They were then quite safe from interruption. During the day, some of the under officers might come in prying and poking about, and the convicts had to be on their guard. As soon as the gates were padlocked, however, everyone sat down in his place and began his work. The interior of the barrack was suddenly lighted up; every man had his own candle and his wooden candlestick, and they all set to work without fear of interruption. Work was not exactly forbidden, but the possession of tools was, and the order was secretly evaded. Each man hungered for the earnings of this private labour, a few coppers, and that it apparently was allowed in this Russian *ostrog*, unlike prisons elsewhere, was

a tangible boon, a certain small compensation for the loss of liberty. Money might be spent, surreptitiously, in buying tobacco and drink, both strictly prohibited, but all the more sweet because indulgence in them was forbidden. Besides, if not quickly expended, the money might be confiscated in the constant and minute searches made. The prisoners were being continually "turned over," and ruthlessly deprived of any money that might be found. The only safe plan was to entrust the cash to one old man, who was strictly honest and extremely cunning at concealment. One of his hiding places was in the stockade at some height, where the stump end of a branch protruded; it was removable, and within was a cavity running down to some depth. The secret was jealously guarded, for the convicts were expert thieves and without a scrap of conscience.

Dostoyevski, for the safe keeping of his small possessions, bought a small box with a lock and key. This was forced open the first night and everything was abstracted. At another time, a comrade who pretended a warm friendship, stole his pocket Bible from him, the only book he was permitted to possess, and sold it forthwith for drink. The friend had been asked to carry it into the barrack only a few yards away. On the way he met a purchaser and at once disposed of the Bible for a few kopecks. He confessed the theft the same evening, explaining that he had a sudden

craving for vodka and could not resist it. When the thirst was on him he would have committed murder to gratify it. He talked of the theft as quite an ordinary incident, and when reproved was not in the least ashamed. He listened calmly, agreed that it was a very useful book and was sorry he had taken it, but in his inner heart thought the grievance was mere nonsense.

Ameliorations of this life might be secured (for money); recreations were possible, though they were mostly vicious, and amusements even might be surreptitiously enjoyed or winked at by the authorities. Human nature is so constituted that it becomes habituated to anything, and the inmates of the *ostrog* learned to endure its worst evils, and, except for the pain of personal chastisement or the acute sufferings engendered by disease, they spent their weary, unlovely days with dogged, callous indifference.

At daybreak every morning a drum beaten near the principal entrance roused all from the last refreshing sleep obtained in the small hours when mosquitoes and more loathsome insects had desisted from their attacks. The convicts rose from their plank beds to the music of clanking leg irons, their inseparable companions, and, trembling with cold as the icy air rushed in through the unbarred open gates, gathered around the water pails, took water into their mouths and washed their faces with their hands. These pails had been filled the

night before by appointed orderlies. Personal cleanliness is not entirely neglected by the peasant class in Russia, nor even by convicts, and the periodical vapour bath was greatly appreciated. The orderlies, like the cooks, were chosen by the convicts themselves from among their numbers; they did not work with the rest, but, as elsewhere, attended to the washing of the floors, the condition of camp bedsteads, and the provision of water for ablutions and for drinking.

After roll-call, the entire number proceeded to the kitchen, where the first meal of the day was eaten in common. The convicts, in their sheepskin overcoats, received their ration of black bread in their parti-coloured, round, peakless caps, from the cooks who had cut up the loaves for them with the "rascal," the prison knife, which was the only weapon permitted in the place. As many as could find room, sat grouped around the tables and laughed noisily; some soaked pieces of bread in the cups of sour tea, *kvas*, in front of them; others drank the tea they were permitted to provide for themselves. This privilege was extended to food generally, and the convicts who could pay for it bought their own, which was cooked in the public kitchen and substituted for the ordinary prison fare. Osip, one of the prison cooks, or "cook maids" as they were commonly called, prepared the food, which was purchased in the town market by the old soldiers who were attached to the prison

to watch over the general discipline and good order of the place. They were good-natured veterans, always ready to run messages and purvey to the needs of the prisoners.

Dostoyevski at first could not stomach the regulation cabbage soup, but eventually overcame his repugnance. Meanwhile, he had his own private table, which cost him no more than a couple of rubles monthly, and he had a morsel of roast meat every day, cooked by Osip in some mysterious fashion that was never divulged. Osip was practically his servant, and was paid regular wages. Suchilov was another who acted as personal attendant, boiled the tea-urn, performed commissions, mended clothes and greased the great-boots four times monthly. Suchilov was an "exchange," a convict who had changed places with another of longer sentence, assuming the punishment for a sum in cash. He was a poor devil, always impecunious, ready for any menial occupation and regularly employed as a lookout man by the gamblers when at play. For five kopecks a night he kept watch in the passage in absolute darkness and in temperatures varying between winter cold and extreme summer heat, to give alarm if any superior officer paid a night visit, for when caught at cards the convicts would pay the penalty with their backs, — all would be soundly flogged. But the terrors of corporal punishment did not conquer the passion for play. There were always men who had the

wherewithal, — a small piece of carpet as board, or “deck,” a candle and a greasy pack of well-thumbed cards. The fortunate possessor of these necessities received fifteen kopecks for their use. The game played was chiefly *gorka*, or “three leaves,” a pure game of chance, and it was continued until far into the night, often until the break of dawn, or within a few minutes of the morning drum. The stakes were for copper coins, but relatively large sums were won and lost.

The passion for gambling was deeply rooted and still consumes the Russian prisoner. Among the exiles travelling in pain and anguish across the Siberian continent, it had such a hold that men would risk their last farthing of the meagre allowance issued for daily rations, and if unlucky, would be obliged to go hungry or depend entirely upon charity. Cards were generally forthcoming, but when none were on hand, various ingenious devices were put in practice on the road. One was to spread an overcoat, or soiled linen foot-robe, on the floor of the prison room, and the game was to guess the exact number of fleas that would jump upon it in a given length of time, and back the opinion with a wager. Another plan was to chalk two small circles, one within the other, on one of the sleeping platforms, *nary*, and place a number of vermin in the inner circle. Then the player would bet on the animal he believed would first cross the line into the outer circle. These unsavoury meth-

ods were also pursued in the old English war prison at Dartmoor.

A craving for strong drink was constantly exhibited, and strange to say, could generally be gratified. A large business was done in smuggling spirits into the *ostrog*. The trade was hazardous but proportionately lucrative. It was undertaken by the convict who was ignorant of any handicraft or too idle to acquire one. His capital was his back, which he was ready to lay bare to the lash if detected in the nefarious traffic, and he must possess a small amount of cash to expend in the vodka. This money he entrusted to some resident in the town, soldier, shopkeeper or free labourer, who brought it up to the prison and concealed it in some hiding place agreed upon outside the gates, on the works to which the convict had access. The stuff paid contribution in transit, and was well watered, but the convict buyer had no redress and took what he could get. With the fluid a length of bullock's intestines was left, which, when washed, was filled with the vodka and wound around the waist of the convict about to introduce it into the prison. The carrier ran the risk of detection when searched, but he had a bribe convenient to slip into the hand of the corporal at the gate, and he might have the good luck to escape observation. If he failed, he paid the penalty of a severe flogging. On the other hand, the forbidden liquor might win through, and the convict

dealer would then have a supply of stuff for the convict customers among his comrades.

As soon as enough money had been earned or stolen, the time was ripe for a carouse, a drunken holiday, when the whole sum, painfully put together, kopeck by kopeck, was lavished in one glorious burst of self-indulgence. The man was resolved to enjoy himself. "These days of rejoicing had been looked forward to long beforehand," says Dostoyevski. "He had dreamed of them during the endless winter nights, during his hardest labour, and the prospect had supported him under his severest trials. The dawn of this day so impatiently awaited has just appeared . . . accordingly he takes his savings to the drink seller who at first gives him vodka, almost pure, but gradually as the bottle gets more and more empty, he fills it up with water. It may be imagined that many glasses and much money are required before the convict is drunk. But, as he is out of the habit, the little alcohol remaining in the liquid easily intoxicates, he drinks all he can get, pledges or sells all his own clothes and then those belonging to the government. When he has made away with his last shirt, he lies down in a drunken sleep and wakes up next day with a bad headache." Then he began again to work for many weary months and amass the means for another debauch.

As for the drink seller, he made his profit to be spent in adding to his stock in trade. But this time

he drank it himself. Enough of trade, he would have a little amusement. Accordingly he ate, drank and paid for a little music, and kept it up for several days until his money was gone, unless, indeed, misfortune overtook him. It might be that some of the officers had noticed his condition, and he was dragged before the major in the orderly room, where he was arraigned, convicted and punished with the rods. Then he shook himself like a beaten dog, and after a few days resumed his trade as drink seller. Detection was not frequent, for the convicts would do all they could to shield a man under the influence of drink. Russians have generally a sympathy for drunkenness. Among convicts it amounted to worship. The condition implied aristocratic distinction, and the man in his cups swaggered and showed himself off with a great assumption of superiority.

The phrase "pay for a little music" needs explanation. A convict in funds and half drunk was in the habit of hiring a musician to make a greater show. There was one who had been a bandsman in the army and who possessed a fiddle which he was ready to play for anyone who paid him, and he would follow his employer about from barrack to barrack, grinding out dance tunes with his utmost strength and skill. His face showed his disgust and boredom, but if he slackened his arm he was roughly reminded to go on more briskly and earn his wage properly.

This love of ostentatious extravagance found other outlets. Drinking to excess was not the only form of self-indulgence. Gormandising was another. The convict when in funds would treat himself to a fine feast, the materials for which were brought in from the town by the old soldier go-between above mentioned. The occasion chosen was always on some religious festival and began by the convict placing a wax candle before the holy image or *ikon* in its honoured corner. Then he would dress himself with extreme care and sit down to dinner in state. He would devour course after course, — fish, meat, patties, — gorging himself quite alone. It was seldom that the selfish creature invited any comrade to share his repast.

A fondness for new clothes was very noticeable in the prosperous convict, and he was not forbidden to substitute the garments of his choice for the prison uniform, which consisted of a coarse shirt, long gray dressing gown, loose drawers and peakless cap. Their taste in clothes ran to gay waistcoats and fancy trousers, coloured shirts, and belts with metal clasps. On Sundays the dandies in the prison put on their best clothes to strut about the barrack yard. But the glory of display soon yielded to the temptation to buy drink and make a little cash. The evening of the very day on which they were first worn the smart clothes would disappear, sold or pledged to the convict pawnbrokers, ever ready for business.

Usury was followed in the *ostrog* quite as a profession. Money was borrowed on all kinds of pledges, often upon articles of equipment, the property of the government. There was no good faith about the transaction. When the money had been advanced, the borrower would go at once and inform the authorities that goods belonging to the state were in the unlawful possession of the usurer, who was forthwith obliged to give them up and accept his loss with the usual penalty of the lash.

A notable specimen of the dealers in vodka was a convict named Gazin, a terrible creature of gigantic proportions and enormous bodily strength. "A more ferocious and more monstrous creature could not exist. He was a Tartar with an enormous and deformed head, like a gigantic spider of the size of a man." The strangest reports were current about him. He was said to have been at one time a soldier; to have been repeatedly exiled, and to have as often escaped only to be recaptured. He had been guilty of the most frightful crimes. He took a delight in killing small children, whom he attracted to some deserted spot, terrified into convulsions, tortured horribly and then murdered. In the prison, however, he seldom exhibited his worst traits. He was generally quiet in demeanour, rarely quarrelsome, and careful to avoid disputes, having too great a contempt for his companions and too good an opinion of himself. His face was

not without intelligence, but cruel and derisive in expression like his smile.

Gazin was the richest of all the vodka sellers, and at regular intervals used his stock in trade for self indulgence. Twice yearly he got completely drunk and when in his cups displayed all his brutal ferocity. As he grew more and more excited, he assailed his comrades with gibes, invectives and venomous satire long since prepared. When quite intoxicated, he waxed furious and, flourishing his knife, truculently rushed at some one to kill him. Then a combined attack was made upon him, and he was disarmed after he had been made unconscious by blows upon the pit of the stomach. When well beaten, he was wrapped up in his pelisse and thrown on to his camp bed to sleep off the effects of drink. On every occasion exactly the same thing occurred; the prisoners knew what would happen as did Gazin himself. This went on for years until his physical energy began to fail; he weakened, complained of illness, and frequently became a patient in hospital, where he was well treated and in due course died.

Gazin, in one of his drunken bouts, fell foul of Dostoyevski and nearly murdered him. He came into the kitchen one day, followed by his fiddler, and staggered up to a table where our author sat with a friend or two drinking. He smiled maliciously and asked with an insolent jeer how they could afford to buy tea. No answer was given,

as any contradiction would have maddened him. Their continued silence had just the same effect. "You must have money," he went on, "a great deal of money; but tell me, are you sent to hard labour to drink tea? Please tell me; I should like to know." Still there was no reply. He trembled and grew livid with rage and looking round for some weapon of offence, seized the heavy bread box and rushed at Dostoyevski, raising it over his head. Death seemed imminent for one and all when a diversion was fortunately created by a voice crying, "Gazin! they have stolen your vodka." The miscreant instantly dropped the box and ran off to recover his treasure. It was never known whether there had been any theft, or whether the words were invented as a stratagem to save the lives threatened.

The vodka seller was in his glory at Christmas time, when there were great festivities and a drunken orgy was in progress with the tacit permission of the authorities. Gazin kept sober until toward the end of the celebration. He stood by the side of his camp bedstead, beneath which he had concealed his store of drink, after bringing it from his customary hiding place deep buried under the snow in the barrack yard. "He smiled knowingly when he saw his customers arrive in crowds. He drank nothing himself; he waited for that till the last day when he had emptied the pockets of his comrades," who degenerated into the wildest ex-

cesses, singing, laughing and crying by turns, patrolling the barrack room in bands, and striking the strings of their *balalaiki* or native guitars.

To drink to excess was the chief way to find an outlet for rejoicing; it was also the means of deadening the hideous anticipation of acute and inevitable pain. A convict sentenced to be flogged invariably contrived to swallow the largest possible dose of spirits beforehand, often a long time ahead and at a fabulous price. A certain conviction prevailed that a drunken man suffered less from the plet or "the stick" than a sober one in the full possession of his faculties. In one case, an ex-soldier awaiting punishment infused a quantity of snuff into a bottle of vodka and drank it off at once. He was seized with violent convulsions, vomited blood, and was taken to hospital unconscious. His lungs had been hopelessly affected, phthisis declared itself and he soon died of consumption.

CHAPTER V

LIFE IN THE OSTROG

The hospital life at Omsk — Humanity of the prison doctors — Tender treatment for victims of the lash — Sympathy shown to one another by convicts — The prison bath — Different classes of criminals — The murderer Petrov — Sirotkin; his history — Luka Kuzmich, the murderer of six men — The "old believer" from Little Russia — Ali, the young Tartar — Two brigands — The Jew, Isaiah Fomich; the prison usurer — The festival of Christmas — Gifts of food and drink sent in from the town — Prison theatricals — Convicts' pets — Tanning and skin dressing carried on by the convicts — Dostoyevski's release.

THE one bright spot in the *ostrog* was the hospital. It was no part, however, of the prison proper. The convicts when sick were lodged in a couple of wards in the military hospital, which stood outside the fortress at a distance of five or six hundred yards. It was a large building of one story, painted yellow, spacious and well managed. Dostoyevski bears witness to the humanity and good feeling of the prison doctors, who made no distinction between the convicts and those who had never come under the ban of the law. In Russia the common people alone vie with the doctors in showing compassion for prisoners, whom they

never reproach with their misdeeds, satisfied that they are suffering sufficiently in working out the sentences imposed upon them. The convicts were grateful for the kindness shown them, and were in the habit of saying that the doctors were like fathers to them and that they could not praise them too highly. This was also the common attitude of the peasantry toward the doctors, who in Russia generally enjoy the affection and respect of the people, although the latter would often prefer to take the empirical remedies of some old witch than go into a hospital and be treated with regular medicine, being influenced by the fantastic stories currently reported of the horrors perpetrated in hospitals. These fears vanish when they have once made acquaintance with the doctors and their humane and compassionate methods of practice. Personal prejudices disappear with personal knowledge.

The prison doctors were careful and attentive to their patients, questioning them minutely about their ailments, diagnosing anxiously and prescribing the necessary remedies with judgment and much medical skill. They were quick to detect imposture and malingering, but were not too hard upon the pretended invalids, whom they could forgive for seeking the ease and comfort of the hospital with its warm lodging, its bed with a mattress and the more palatable food. They had a scientific name for feigned disease, which they styled *febris*

catharalis, a formula quite understood, and an imaginary malady required a week's treatment. But they drew the line at last, and refused to be further imposed upon. If any one seemed disposed to linger on in hospital, the doctor would say plainly, "Come, come, you have had your rest, you must go out now and take no more liberties."

One case of persistent malingering must be quoted. It was of a class not unknown in western prisons. A convict long suffered from a seemingly incurable disease of the eyes for which no treatment availed, although plasters, blisters, and leeches were tried. This particular prisoner was under sentence to receive a thousand lashes, and he was eager to postpone the punishment as long as possible. The most desperate devices have been tried for this purpose, sometimes even a murderous attack upon an officer or comrade, which would entail a fresh trial and an additional penalty, but which would also delay the flogging. The man with the sore eyes had some secret method of aggravating the disease which was never discovered, but its use was eventually checked by another operation applied to the back of the patient's neck. The skin was taken up into the form of a blister, into which a double incision was made, one on each side and a thick thread of cotton was passed through the wound. Every day at a certain hour the thread was pulled backward and forward so that the wound would suppurate and never heal.

The torture of this was intolerable, and to escape the continual suffering the convict volunteered to leave the hospital. Almost immediately after he went out, his eyes became well and as soon as the neck was healed he underwent his corporal punishment.

It was a painful moment for the hospital when the victim of a severe flogging was brought in fresh from the lash. He was received with grave composure and a respect proportioned to the enormity of his offence and the amount of punishment it had entailed. Those who had suffered most cruelly were thought more of than the mere deserter guilty of a minor military crime. If the patient were too much injured to attend to himself, he received even more sympathy. The surgeons knew they were leaving him in kindly and experienced hands. The treatment of the poor back, all scored and mangled, was extremely simple: the constant application of a piece of linen steeped in cold water. A very delicate operation inflicting acute torture was the picking out from the lacerated wounds the scraps and fragments of the twigs when the flogging had been performed by rods. Yet the sufferers usually exhibited extraordinary stoicism. Dostoyevski says: "I have seen many convicts who had been whipped cruelly. I do not remember one who uttered a groan. Only after such an experience the countenance becomes pale and discomposed, the eyes glitter, the look wan-

ders and the lips tremble so that the patient sometimes bites them till they bleed."

Quoting further and speaking of one man just flogged, the same writer says: "He was only twenty years old. He had been a soldier and was rather a fine man, tall and well-made, with a bronzed skin. His back, uncovered down to the waist, had been seriously beaten and his body trembled with fever beneath the damp sheet applied to his bleeding sores. For the first half hour he walked up and down the room in agony. I looked in his face; he seemed to be thinking of nothing, his eyes had a strange expression at once wild and timid; they fixed themselves with difficulty upon surrounding objects. He stared at the hot tea I had before me steaming in its cup. I offered it to the poor creature who stood there shivering, with chattering teeth, and he drank it down at one gulp, without looking at me or making a sign, then put the cup down silently and resumed his walk. His pain was too intense for words or thanks. No one questioned him or spoke; the other prisoners attended to the changing of the cold compresses, thinking rightly that he would prefer that to outspoken compassion, and the sufferer seemed satisfied and grateful to be left severely alone."

That the convicts, even the most criminal and degraded, were not quite heartless or insensible to the finer feelings, was to be seen in their demeanour when a sick comrade died in hospital. The passing

away of one poor victim of consumption is told with infinite pathos and much painful realism. Toward the end he became almost unconscious, his sight was confused, he recognised no one and was evidently suffering acutely. His respiration was painful, deep and irregular; his breast rose and fell convulsively as he struggled for breath, and he cast off his bedding as an intolerable burden. When exposed, it was terrible to see his immensely long body — with fleshless arms and legs, and ribs as clearly marked as a skeleton's — which was absolutely naked but for the cross pendent from his neck and his leg irons. As his last moment approached, a death-like stillness prevailed, no one spoke or only in whispers. The convicts stepped on tiptoe across the floor, gazing furtively at the dying man, who caught with trembling hand at the cross, which seemed to be suffocating him, and tried to tear it off; the rattling in his throat grew more and more pronounced, and at last he died.

The spectators behaved with impressive reverence. One convict closed the dead man's eyes, crossing himself, and the rest imitated the action. The corporal on duty came in, removed his helmet and also crossed himself, as he looked intently at the naked, shrivelled corpse still loaded with irons, which fell to the ground with a sharp sound and rattled along it as the body was lifted from the bed and carried out. The spell was broken; every one spoke as usual, and the voice of the corporal

was heard calling for the blacksmith to remove chains no longer needed as a restraint. The spirit had taken flight; no physical precaution could serve to prevent its escape.

It is hardly necessary to dilate upon the cruel and indefensible practice, still observed by some so-called civilised countries, of imposing fetters upon those whom the law has condemned to the loss of personal liberty. The poor excuse of their need for safe custody is always pleaded, and the best answer is that of the old English judge who suggested that gaolers build their prison walls higher when he forbade the use of irons. No such argument can be used with the Russian authorities, who would still maintain the necessity of irons as a means of preventing escape, although they have never availed, entirely, and they would urge as a secondary reason that their use implies a moral degradation no less than a physical burden. It is a well known fact that the determined convict can and does constantly rid himself of his chains in Russian prisons, by hammering out the rivets with a stone, or elongating the basils sufficiently to allow the ankles to be drawn through. But the retention of irons upon convicts when sick and suffering cannot be justified, viewed from any standpoint. When men are really ill and must still carry their chains unvaryingly in bed and in hospital, the cruelty is manifest. In health it is found that the limbs shrivel and waste away, but for those in the

fangs of disease, such as scurvy, phthisis or fever, it is an added intolerable torment, altogether prejudicial, postponing or often preventing recovery. Yet the doctors themselves, kindly men, convinced of their evil effects, hesitate to recommend the removal of irons from their patients in the very worst stages of illness and, as we have just seen, death itself is the only relief that can come.

The horrible inconvenience caused by those inseparable companions is well illustrated by the difficulty in putting on or taking off clothing, a rare business, no doubt, for the convicts made few changes and slept fully clothed, but it must be done at the periodical visit to the public bath. The chains were fastened to a leather waistbelt by two straps, one for each leg, and they must be held up in this way, or walking would be impossible. Each end of the chain was attached to a ring loosely fitting the leg so that a finger must be inserted between the iron and the flesh; the straps were necessary to keep the ring in its place, or the skin would be chafed and broken the very first day. To remove the trousers or the shirt is quite an art and only slowly acquired.

We get a graphic description of the prison bath as taken in collective fashion by a hundred convicts at one time, all of them crowded into one small apartment some twelve feet square. Not a single scrap of space was unoccupied, they were huddled together on benches tier above tier, so that the feet

of those above trampled on those below and the leg chains became inextricably entangled and numbers were trampled on or dragged about the floor. The bath itself was like a drunken orgy; a dense volume of steam filled the room and deluges of dirty hot water were dashed to and fro from the pailful carried by every bather. Everyone was naked save for the rattling chains to which the convicts howled a mad accompaniment. They were maddened by the excitement, the tropical heat, the smart of the blows self-administered or struck by the hired rubbers, for convicts were always to be found who for a kopeck or two were willing to lay strokes on the heated flesh of the employers with birch rods of twisted twigs. It must have been a hideous scene, a great mass of commingled humanity in a state of half intoxication, shouting and shrieking at the top of their voices. The steam grew thicker and thicker until all were soaked and saturated with it, and their bodies became scarlet in the intolerably burning and overheated atmosphere.

The *ostrog* at Omsk contained a number of widely differing types, embracing many classes of crime, the most heinous as well as venial offences. All classes and many nationalities of the widespread Russian Empire were represented; well-bred nobles, degraded from their rank and sent to herd with serfs and peasants, and "old believers" from little Russia, insurgent Poles, mutinous

soldiers sentenced by court-martial for desertion and grave acts of insubordination, mountaineers from the Caucasus exiled for brigandage, and Mahometans from Daghestan who lay in wait for passing caravans and pillaged them and assassinated the merchant travellers. There were murderers in many varieties; Cain who killed slowly and deliberately with deep malice and forethought, and the slayer moved to murder by swiftly risen, passionate impulse in a sudden irresistible access of fury. Thieves of all sorts abounded; petty pilferers and robbers on a grand scale; the wandering tramps or *brodyagi* who had escaped from durance to range the woods and steal from all they met. There were also many smugglers, long trained and practised in the traffic, who clung with great attachment to the business and who were constantly engaged in the clandestine introduction of spirits into the prison.

The story of one murderer, Petrov, exhibits a curious and somewhat uncommon character. He had been a soldier and had suddenly revolted at the ill-usage of his colonel who struck him one day on parade. It was not the first time he had been beaten, for the personal chastisement of their men was by no means uncommon with Russian officers, but on this occasion Petrov would not tamely submit, and retaliated by stabbing the colonel to the heart. It was said of him in prison that when the spirit moved him, nothing would stop him; he was

capable of anything, and he would kill a man without the smallest hesitation or without showing the slightest remorse. The evil temper in him was easily aroused and was then ungovernable. Once he was sentenced to be whipped for some minor offence, no small punishment certainly, and he resolved not to submit to it. He had been previously flogged more than once and had borne his punishment calmly and philosophically. But this time he considered that he was innocent and wrongfully sentenced. He meant to resist, even to go so far as to kill the governor, if necessary, sooner than yield. This major-governor was a much dreaded being, a tyrannical disciplinarian, with lynx-like eyes for the detection of any irregularity; he was commonly called by the convicts "the man with eight eyes." His severe method had generally the effect of irritating his charges, naturally ill-tempered and irascible men.

Petrov made no secret of his fell purpose, and it was known throughout the prison that when called up for punishment he would make an end of the major. He had successfully concealed a sharp-pointed shoemaker's awl, which he held ready in his hand as he was marched under escort to the place of execution. The prisoners, in breathless anticipation of what they might see, clung close to the stockade, peering through the interstices, for they believed the major's last hour had come. But the major, quite ignorant of his impending doom, had suddenly de-

cided not to witness the flogging, and drove home in his carriage leaving his lieutenant to superintend the punishment parade. "God has saved him," ejaculated the convicts piously, and Petrov submitted to his ordeal without a murmur. His anger was against the major and it had disappeared when the object was removed.

On another occasion, he had quarrelled with a comrade over the possession of a worthless piece of rag. They disputed with great violence and a collision seemed inevitable. Suddenly Petrov turned pale, his lips trembled, growing blue and bloodless, his respiration became difficult, and slowly he approached his antagonist step by step — he always walked with naked feet — while a deathlike stillness around succeeded the noisy chatter of the other convicts in the yard. The man he threatened awaited him tremblingly and suddenly blanched and gave in by throwing the cloth of contention at his adversary, using the most horrible and insulting language toward him.

This Petrov was a man of contradictory traits. In person he was of short stature, agile and strongly built, with a pleasant face, a bold expression, white regular teeth and an agreeable voice. He seemed quite young, no more than thirty, although he was fully forty years of age. He always appeared absent-minded and had a habit of looking into the distance over and beyond near objects. An attentive listener, joining with animation in the talk, he would

suddenly become silent, oppressed, as it were, with disturbing thoughts. He was deemed a most resolute character and inspired the utmost awe in every one, as capable of anything if the caprice seized him; ready to murder any one out of hand without hesitation, and never deterred by the dread of subsequent remorse. He generally showed tact and forbearance in his relations with others, spoke to them civilly and was not easily roused or annoyed.

Sirotkin was another type of ex-soldier who had found military discipline insufferable and was resolved to escape from it at any cost. All went wrong with him; every one was harsh and cruel and he was forever being punished, and sobbing as if broken-hearted in some remote corner. One dark night when on sentry duty he was so unutterably sad that he placed the muzzle of his piece to his breast and pressed the trigger with his big toe. The gun missed fire twice; then he paced his beat carrying his musket reversed. He was checked for this by the captain of the guard, whereupon he bayonnetted his officer then and there. He received a long sentence and could never realise that he richly deserved it. He was an enigma to all; mild-mannered, with tranquil blue eyes, a clear complexion and a soft air, and seemingly quite incapable of a murderous crime. When addressed, he answered quickly and with deference, but otherwise spoke little and rarely laughed. There was an expression in his eyes as of a child of ten; he cared for nothing

but ginger-bread cakes, on which he lavished the small sums he sometimes earned, although he was lazy and apathetic and had no trade.

Luka Kuzmich was a convict who had killed as many as six men in cold blood and was much given to glory in his misdeeds. Yet for all his bragging words he was despised by his comrades, who summed him up as a conceited swaggerer inspiring no real fear. He often told the story of a crime of which he was especially proud, the murder of a major in another prison, but it made no impression because of his vanity and self-sufficiency. The major was a bully, one of those who used the blasphemous formula, customary at times with common men promoted undeservedly to high office, and who cried to his charges, "I will teach you to behave yourselves — I am your Czar, your God!" Luka, after upbraiding his comrades for not resenting these pretensions, borrowed the "rascal," the one sharp knife permitted to be kept in the kitchen, went up to the major, and stabbed him in the intestines. He gained great notoriety for this horrible deed, and a crowd assembled to witness the infliction of the five hundred lashes given him for the crime, but no one in the prison thought the more of him when he told the story, or believed him when he posed as a very terrible person.

In sharp but pleasing contrast to these miscreants were convicts who had undoubtedly broken the law, but from mistaken motives, — under pressure of re-

ligious dissent, or in obedience to and by the example of elders. One man belonged to the sect of "old believers," dissenters in Little Russia from the orthodox state religion, and when a number of them had been converted at Starodub, this old man, Notey, bitterly resented the building of a new Greek church and joined with others to burn it down. This act of incendiarism was visited with a sentence of imprisonment which this well-to-do shopkeeper accepted courageously, convinced that he was "a sufferer for the true faith." He bore his penalty as a martyrdom and was proud of it, firmly believing he had done well in destroying an opposition church. A peaceable, kindly old man of sixty years, he had a mild, good-natured face and clear limpid eyes which were surrounded with many little wrinkles. He was of a gay, light-hearted temperament, ready to crack jokes with his fellows, not with the coarse cynical laughter of other convicts, but with something of simple childish glee. He had quickly acquired the respect and good will of all the prisoners, who had such implicit confidence in him that he was the universal banker trusted to hold and conceal their little hoards of cash and to honestly account for all moneys deposited with him.

In spite of the firmness with which he endured his hard fate, he was tormented by profound and incurable grief. At night, or in the small hours, he was in the habit of leaving his bed and climbing up to the top of the great porcelain stove where he

regularly performed his devotions, praying aloud with broken, agonised sobs. He might be heard repeating as he wept, "Lord, do not forsake me. Master, strengthen me! My poor little children, my dear little children, we shall never see each other again." He would remain there in earnest supplication until dawn came and the prison was opened.

Another estimable creature was a young Tartar, Ali by name, one of a band of brigands from Daghestan. He had been drawn into evil practices by his elder brothers and sentenced for what was really their crime, but "extenuating circumstances" were admitted, and he received the minimum punishment. One day he had been ordered to take his yataghan, mount his horse and ride abroad with his brothers as they were bent upon plundering the caravan of a rich Armenian merchant, whom they slew, taking possession of his goods. They were captured, tried, flogged and sent to Siberia. Every one liked this lad — he was only twenty-two years old — on account of his gaiety and good temper. His frank, intelligent face was always calm and placid; there was a childish simplicity in his confident smile; his large and expressive black eyes were so full of friendliness and tender sympathy that it was a relief to look at him. His three brothers, the real cause of his misfortune, loved him with paternal affection. He was their chief consolation. Dull and sad as a rule, they always smiled when they spoke to him, as to a child, and their forbidding countenances

lighted up. He did not dare address them first; he recognised their superiority as elders and treated them with great deference and respect. It was a strange fact that he could preserve his native honesty and remain firm and uncorrupted among such surroundings. Chaste as a young girl, everything that was foul, shameful or unjust filled him with indignation. He carefully avoided quarrels and yet he was no coward and could not be insulted with impunity.

At this time there were two Lesghians from the Caucasus, mountain brigands, one of whom was tall and thin, with a bad face. The other, by name Nourra, was universally popular. Of middle height and built like a Hercules, with fair hair, and violet eyes, he had exceedingly mild manners, although he had been constantly engaged as a rebel and his body bore many scars from old bayonet wounds. His conduct in prison was exemplary, and he punctiliously observed the rules. Thieving, cheating and drunkenness filled him with disgust; he evinced his indignation and turned away, but without quarrelling. Fervently pious, he said his prayers religiously and strictly observed all Mahometan fasts. He clung firmly to the hope that when his sentence ended he would be sent back to the Caucasus. Indeed, without this consolation he would certainly have died in prison.

There is a humourous side to every situation, and the dark, gloomy life in the *ostrog* was brightened

at times by the comicalities of one prisoner, a Jew, Isaiah Fomich by name, who was a butt and laughing-stock for all. He was a murderer who had been publicly whipped, exposed on the pillory and branded for a crime of greed. The branding had left frightful scars, to remove which he had received a famous specific, but he was waiting until his release to use it, years ahead. "Otherwise, I shall not be able to marry," he would say, "and I must absolutely get married." His first appearance in the prison evoked general laughter. He looked like a poor, plucked fowl, gaunt and thin and with hardly an ounce of flesh on his bones. Already of uncertain age, small, feeble, cunning and at the same time stupid, but boastful, and a horrible coward, it was difficult to believe he could have borne a flogging. The life of the prison seemed to agree with him and it was believed he was quite pleased to be condemned, as it gave him a chance of making a good deal of money. He was a jeweller by trade and a good workman. There was no "free" jeweller in the town of Omsk, and he secured more orders than he could execute, for which he was always well paid. Being rich, he soon was able to purchase all he wanted. He fared sumptuously; he bought a samovar, a tea cup, and a mattress. With his spare cash he also soon became the prison usurer, and almost every convict in the prison was in his debt and paid him heavy interest on small loans.

His arrival was greeted with great interest. He

was the only Jew in the prison, and everyone crowded round to stare at him when he was first brought in with his hair shaved on the right side of his head. He sat on his plank bed, clinging to his bag, not daring to raise his eyes or resent the ridicule heaped upon him. A young convict came up to him, bringing a ragged pair of old linen trousers, and asked what Fomich would advance on them. "A silver ruble? No, only seven kopecks (seven farthings)," said the Jew, "and three kopecks interest." "By the year?" he was asked. "No, by the month," he replied. And the bargain was struck after much contemptuous laughter, whereupon Fomich put the pledged rags carefully away in his bag.

They all laughed at him, but no one insulted him, and he was rather proud of being noticed, as he thought it added to his importance. He gave himself great airs; he would sing in a squeaking, falsetto voice some idiotic refrain to a ridiculous tune, and perform the most comical antics. On Saturday evening, the convicts would collect to see him celebrate his Sabbath and he was greatly flattered by the curiosity displayed. He prepared his table in one corner with a very dignified air, lighted two candles, clothed himself in his robes, put on the phylacteries and tied a little box on his forehead where it protruded like a horn. Then he read aloud, wept and tore his hair, and suddenly changed into a hymn of triumph delivered with a nasal tone. All this, as he

readily explained, was to typify the lamentations at the loss of Jerusalem, changing into rejoicing at the return.

One day, when at his worship, the major came in and stood behind the Jew while he was wildly gesticulating without noticing the governor, who, after watching him for some time, burst out laughing and went off with the one exclamation, "idiot." Afterward Fomich declared that he had not seen the major; that he was always in a state of ecstatic abstraction when saying his prayers. He was, or pretended to be, a very strict Jew, and liked people to admire his punctilious observance of the rule of idleness on his Saturday Sabbath; and was very proud of his visit to the synagogue under escort as a single worshipper, a privilege to which he was entitled by law. Fomich was at the height of his glory in the bath, where he treated himself to the services of several rubbers and sang loudly when the hubbub was highest and the steam most plentiful.

The festival of Christmas, so highly esteemed throughout Russia, was strictly observed also in the prison. The convicts were eager to show that they were doing the same as the rest of the world outside, and to feel that they were not altogether reprobates cast out by society. It was essentially a high day and holiday, when no work was enforced or undertaken, and when rejoicing, enjoyment and sensual gratification became, with permission, the

order of the day. A complete change came over the prison on the eve of the great day. Almost all were busy preparing to keep Christmas in suitable fashion according to their own ideas. The chief of these was to revel in unaccustomed good living. The old soldiers, the guards who might come and go, brought in openly the supplies ordered from the town, suckling pigs, poultry and joints of meat; and the drink sellers, no less active, smuggled in their vodka secretly.

Every one was moving early, the drum beat was heard long before dawn and the convicts were well up and dressed when the officer of the day came in to muster the men and wish them a happy Christmas. This interchange of compliments was general even between convicts who had not spoken to each other before; those who had once quarrelled forgot their enmity in the desire for peace and good-will. A sort of universal friendship prevailed in harmony with the sentiment of the day. It was encouraged by the good feeling expressed from outside, for relays of gifts of food, great and small, began to arrive from the town to be distributed among the prisoners.

The kitchens were the chief centre of interest. Great fires were blazing, and the cooks were preparing the festive entertainment, under the eyes, or with the assistance of the convicts themselves. Every one supplemented the daily ration with choice morsels privately purchased out of hard-earned

savings. But no one tasted food until the priest arrived with cross and holy water; a small table had been prepared for him with a holy image on it, and before it a lamp was burning. After he had conducted the service, the pre-Christmas fast ended, and the feast began by the permission of the commandant, who had visited the barrack formally and tasted the cabbage soup, but had made no remark about the additional delicacies provided and which were now brought in to be greedily devoured.

The scene presently degenerated into an orgy. Faces became flushed with drink and good cheer; the *balalaiki*, or banjos, were produced; the fiddler, paid by a convivial convict, played lively dance music. The conversation became more and more animated and more and more noisy, but the dinner ended without great disorder. Later, drunkenness was general; it was no offence that day, and even the officers, who made the regulation visits, paid no attention. The antics of the intoxicated were an amusing spectacle to most. But a few of the more orderly and right-thinking showed their disapproval. The "old believer" from Starodub climbed up to his favourite perch on top of the stove and fervently prayed for the rest of the day. The sight of these excesses was exceedingly painful to him. The Mahometan prisoners took no part in the revels; they looked on with much curiosity and manifest disgust. The youth Nourra, already mentioned, shook his head crying, "Aman, Aman. Alas!

Alas! It is an offence to Allah!" The Jew, Isaiah Fomich, declined to join in a celebration commemorating an offence committed by his co-religionists, and to show his contempt for Christ, lighted a candle and went to work in a favourite corner.

As the day passed, reckless self-indulgence gradually increased, but the general drunkenness and debauchery began to lapse into wearisome depression. Men who had been convulsed with uproarious laughter became maudlin and dropped into some out of the way spot, weeping bitter tears; others, pale and sickly, tottered about, seeking quarrels with all whom they met. Old differences were revived; disputes soon developed into personal conflicts; frequently two of the men would come to blows as to which should stand treat to the other. The whole spectacle was insupportable, nauseating and repulsive. The great festival, which should have passed with so much delight, ended in dejection and disappointment. The convicts, drunken or sober, alike dropped down on their camp beds and slept heavily.

In some countries prisoners have been permitted to find relief in theatrical performances. It was so in the Spanish presidios, and here in the old Russian *ostrog* a dramatic entertainment, on a most ambitious scale, was a feature of the Christmas holidays. A convict company was organised very secretly; it was always uncertain whether the major would consent, and all was kept from his knowledge

until the last moment. The rehearsals were quite private; the names of the plays were unknown, or how the costumes and scenery were to be obtained. The stage was created in a space cleared in the centre of the barrack, and could be put up and taken down in a quarter of an hour. The moving spirit was one Bakluchin, who had been a soldier in Riga, and had murdered his rival, a German, whom he had caught paying addresses to his fiancée and who was preferred by her. This Bakluchin, who was thirty years old, was of lofty stature, with a frank, determined countenance, but good-natured and generally popular. He had the comedian's knack of changing his face in comic imitation of any passer-by, and convulsed all who saw him. As the projected performance took place, Bakluchin swelled with ill-concealed importance and boasted of the success he would achieve. He went about declaiming portions of his part and amusing everybody by anticipation.

Two popular pieces were chosen for performance, plays from an old book, preserved by memory in the traditions of the prison. Many of the "properties," too, had been handed down, carefully concealed in secret places for years. One of them, the curtain, which was a work of art, was composed of numerous scraps of cloth sewed together, such as the linen of old shirts, bandages, and underwear; even pieces of strong paper were added to fill in empty spaces; and on the surface was painted in oil a landscape

with trees and ponds of flowers. This curtain delighted the convicts and shared the first applause with the orchestra of eight instruments, — two violins, three banjos, two guitars and a tambourine. The musicians played well, and the tunes were all original and distinctive.

The audience, before the curtain rose, crowded and crushed into the narrow theatre, wild with suppressed excitement. Two benches were placed immediately in front of the stage, which was lighted with candle ends. These seats, with one or two chairs, were for the officers who might deign to be present, — the overseers, clerks, directors of works and engineers. Behind stood the convicts respectfully, row after row. Some were posted on the camp beds or had climbed up on the porcelain stove, and every face glowed with delight, a strange look of infinite contentment and unmingled pleasure shining on these scarred and branded countenances so generally dark and forbidding. Everyone was dressed in his best, his short sheepskin pelisse, in spite of the suffocating heat, and each face was damp with perspiration. Everyone was there: The Tartars and Circassians, who showed a passionate delight for the theatre; Young Ali, whose childish face beamed and whose laughter was contagious; the Jew, Isaiah Fomich, who was in an ecstasy from the rising of the curtain to its fall, and rejoiced at the chance of showing off, for when the plate was passed he ostentatiously contributed the

imposing sum of ten kopecks, or twopence, half-penny.

As the play proceeded, it was received with warm applause. Cries of approbation were heard in all parts of the house. The convicts nudged each other with loud whispers, calling attention to the jokes, laughing uproariously, smacking their lips and clacking their tongues, and toward the end the gaiety reached its climax. "Imagine the convict prison," says Dostoyevski, "the chains of long years of captivity in close confinement, the bodily toil monotonous and unending, the accumulated, long protracted misery and despair, and the grim place of durance transformed on this occasion into one of light-hearted amusement where prisoners might forget their condition, dismiss the nightmare of crime and breathe freely and laugh aloud."

A comedy in prison! The convicts were in costumes altogether different from the daily garb of shame, but with the inseparable chains always obstructing. One was in female attire, wearing an old worn-out muslin dress, with neck and arms bare and a pert calico cap on his half shaven head. Another represented a gentleman of fashion in a frock coat, round hat and cloak, but his chains rattled as he strutted across the stage; one was in the full-dress but faded uniform of an aide-de-camp. There were convicts in many characters, strange and varied: a nobleman, an innkeeper, demons, a Brahmin in flowing robes. Every one was delighted when

the performance ended, and the convicts separated, quite pleased to have been taken away from themselves for a brief space, full of praise for the actors and of gratitude to their superiors, who had permitted the play to be given. It was a wise concession, for the convicts made a point of conducting themselves in the most exemplary fashion.

The prisoners in the *ostrog* were fond of live animals, and if permitted, would have filled the prison with domesticated pets. They had dogs, geese, a horse and even an eagle whom they vainly sought to tame. "Bull" was a good-sized black dog with white spots, intelligent eyes and a bushy tail. He lived in the prison enclosure, slept in the courtyard, ate the waste scraps from the kitchen and had little hold on the sympathy of the men, all of whom he regarded as masters and owners. He came to greet the working parties on their return from labour, wagging his tail and looking for the caresses which he seldom got. Dostoyevski, as he tells us, was one of the first to make friends with Bull by giving him a piece of bread and patting him on the back, which pleased him greatly. "That evening, not having seen me for the whole day," says the author, "he ran up to me leaping and barking. Then he put his paws on my shoulders and looked me in the face. 'Here is a friend sent to me by destiny,' I said to myself, and during the first weeks, so full of pain, every time I returned to the barrack I hastened to fondle and make much of Bull."

Another dog was called Snow. He was a luckless creature who had been driven over and injured in the spine by the wheels of a *telyega*, "country cart." He looked like two dogs because of the curvature of his spine, and he was mangy, with bleared eyes and a hairless tail always drooping between his hind legs. Snow was abjectly submissive to all, both men and fellow-dogs. He never barked nor made overtures, but continually turned on his back to curry favour, and received the kick of every passer without a sign of resentment, except that if hurt he would often utter one low deprecatory yelp. When surprised with a caress wholly unexpected and unusual, he quivered and whined plaintively with delight. His fate was sad and brutal; he was torn to pieces by other dogs in the ditch of the fortress.

A third dog was Kultiapka, brought in as a puppy soon after he had been born in one of the prison workshops. Bull took him under his especial protection and "fathered" and played with him. He was always of abbreviated height but grew steadily in length and breadth, and was quaint in appearance. One ear hung constantly down while the other was always cocked up. He had a fine, fluffy, mouse-coloured coat which cost him his life. One of the convicts who made ladies' shoes cast greedy eyes upon Kultiapka, and having felt his skin lured him into a corner, killed and flayed him. A little later the young wife of one of the officers appeared

in a smart pair of velvet boots trimmed with mouse coloured fur.

Tanning and skin dressing was a trade much followed in the prison. Dogs which had been stolen by servants were brought in and sold. On one occasion a fine black dog of good breed was disposed of by a scamp of a footman for thirty kopecks. The poor beast must have anticipated what was in store for him, for he looked up at the convicts in a distressed, beseeching way, but could find no pity, and he was speedily hanged. The same fate overtook the prison goat, a beautiful white kid of whom every one was fond. The pretty creature was full of grace and was very playful, jumping on and off the kitchen table, wrestling with the convicts and always full of fun and spirits. He grew up into a fine, fat beast with magnificent horns, which it was proposed to gild and which were often decorated with flowers. It was the custom for the goat to march at the head of the convicts when returning from labour, and when the eyes of the choleric major fell upon it in the procession, he forthwith ordered it to be executed. The goat was killed and flayed; both carcass and skin were sold in the prison; the latter went to the leather dresser, the former, which fetched a ruble and fifty kopecks, was roasted and the flesh retailed among the convicts.

Other strange pets were a flock of geese, which somehow had been hatched within the enclosure,

and as they grew up they attached themselves to the prisoners and would march out with them regularly to labour. When the drum beat and the parties assembled at the great gate, the geese came cackling, flapping their wings and hopping along. While the convicts worked, the geese pecked about close at hand until the time came for return, when they again joined the procession and marched with their friends solemnly back to the barracks, to the great amusement of the bystanders. The close attachment between the birds and their friends did not save the geese from having their necks twisted and being added to the dinner on a feast day.

The captive eagle did not take kindly to detention. It had been brought in wounded, with a broken wing and half dead. Nothing could domesticate or tame it. It gazed fiercely and fearlessly on the curious crowd and opened its beak as if determined to sell its life dearly. As soon as a chance came it hopped away on one leg, flapping its one uninjured wing, and hid in a far-off, inaccessible corner, from which it never emerged. The convicts often gathered to stare at it and would bait it with the dog Bull, who hesitated, in wholesome dread of the savage bird's beak and claws. The eagle long refused food, and although he finally took meat and drank water left with him, he would consume nothing that was given him by hand or when any one's eye was upon him. When no one was near, he would creep out of his corner and take a walk of a dozen steps, hopping

and limping backward and forward with great regularity under the lee of the stockade. He resisted pugnaciously all overtures to friendship, and would suffer no one to pet him or pat him but pined away, lonely and irreconcilable, waiting only for death.

At last the convicts were moved to compassion for the caged bird, deprived of liberty like themselves. It was seriously discussed whether he ought not to be set free. So he was securely tied, taken out to the ramparts when the parties went to labour, and thrown out on the bare, barren steppe. The bird immediately hurried away, flapping his wounded wing and striving desperately to get out of sight of his captors. They looked after him enviously; they had given him the freedom they did not possess, a boon they hungered for unceasingly night and day, winter and summer, but especially when the sun shone bright and they could see the boundless plain stretching away in the blue distance beyond the river Irtysh and across the free Kirghiz Steppe.

Dostoyevski feelingly records his sensations when the day for his release at length arrived. The night before, as darkness fell, he went round the enclosure for the last time, revisiting every spot where he had suffered the bitter pangs of imprisonment, solitary and despairing, — the place where he had counted over and over again the thousands and thousands of days he had still to remain inside. The next morning, before the exodus for labour, he made

the rounds to bid his comrades farewell; and many a coarse, horny hand was held out to him with hearty good-will. The generous souls gave him Godspeed, but others who were more envious turned their backs on him and would not reply to his kindly greetings. His last visit was to the blacksmith's shop. He went without escort, and placed his feet on the anvil, each in turn; the rivets were struck out of the basils and he was freed from his chains.

“Liberty! New life, resurrection from the dead! Unspeakable moment!”

CHAPTER VI

TIUMEN AND TOMSK

New route taken by exiles since opening of the Trans-Siberian railway — Increased numbers produced overcrowding in all prisons both in Europe and Asia — The "forwarding prisons" the cause of much distress — The Tiumen prison; cells, kitchen, hospital — Infectious diseases — Death-rate — Tomsk forwarding prison — Conditions worse than at Tiumen — The balagan or family "kamera" — Futile attempts to dispute incontrovertible evidence — "Étapes" or road prisons and "polu étapes" or half-way houses — Distance covered daily by the marching parties — The "telyegas" or country carts which carried the sick — Method of buying provisions from villagers en route — The "étape" of Achinsk — Infectious diseases in these prisons — The reports of Governor-General Anuchin — Sympathy of the Czar Alexander III.

THE old order changeth slowly, and the hideous memories of the black and baleful past will long survive. The pages which record the disgraceful facts may be torn out of Russian prison history but they can never be eradicated or forgotten. Let it be granted that reforms and improvements have been introduced, and that some of the most glaring evils have been removed, we may doubt whether in the present condition of the empire, still shaken to its very base by disaster and disaffection, the better-

ment goes below the surface or will be lasting. The governing authorities in these troublous times have but little leisure to discuss penology, and although long since aroused to a lively sense of the shortcomings of their prison system, they are slow to mend their ways. Changes and ameliorations promised still tarry by the way, and there is but little hope that the frightful conditions so long prevailing have even in part disappeared.

The chief blot upon the method of transportation no longer exists, it is true. The wearisome, almost interminable march has been replaced by the long railway journey over the Trans-Siberian line, completed in 1897 and opened the following year for the conveyance of exiles. The convicts no longer spend a couple of years or more on a journey now performed in eight or ten days. Their sufferings are no longer protracted indefinitely, but for a brief space they are still locked up like cattle in dirty, ill-ventilated vans, and are still collected in the foul "forwarding prisons," whence they pass on for distribution to Eastern Siberia, the convict colony of Saghalien, or the outer darkness near the North Pole. A few well-planned and commodious new prisons have been erected in recent years, for which credit must be given to the prison administration, but they have applied only a partial remedy to existing conditions.

The exile route to-day naturally follows the new line of railway. From Moscow the road strikes

south to Samara on the Volga, to which point a large passenger traffic is brought by the great waterway to board the trains. From Samara to Ufa on the west slope the Ural Mountains, and after scaling them the line descends to Chelyabinsk on the Siberian frontier. Here the convict travellers are divided into parties according to their destination. Some go north toward Tiumen and Tobolsk, others travel due east in the direction of Lake Baikal, and others start south for Semipalatinsk and the Altai.

The route before the railway was built was from Moscow, the centre of the home prison system, thence by train to Nizhni-Novgorod, and on by boat down the Volga through Kazan to Perm, and thence by train across the Ural Mountains to Ekaterinburg and Tiumen. All exiles of whatever class, without distinction or separation, travelled this way, and all halted at Tiumen, where they were made up into parties and forwarded to their several destinations.

Overcrowding was the curse of all Russian prisons; the cause of discomforts innumerable, inflicting untold suffering, producing deadly endemic and epidemic diseases. That it was the same everywhere, we are told on incontestable authority, and the futile attempts made by superficial inquirers to vindicate the government which is responsible are contemptible. To begin with St. Petersburg, the official report of the society for prisons stated that

in 1880 the show prison, the Litovski Zamok, although built for seven hundred inmates, uniformly contained from nine hundred to a thousand; and the depot prison, supposed to hold two hundred, was always filled with double the number. The first named had 103 rooms nominally for eight hundred persons. These rooms, as described by an eye-witness, were exceedingly dirty, and he further says: "The 'black holes' are dreadful; they are absolutely deprived of light; a dark labyrinth leads to them and within all is wet, with rotten floors and dripping walls. A man coming from the outer air staggers away half asphyxiated. Specialists say that the healthiest man will surely die if he is kept there for three or four weeks. After a short stay prisoners went out exhausted; several could hardly stand on their feet."

As to the specific charge of overcrowding, a few details must carry conviction. The prison at Nizhni-Novgorod was built for three hundred, and generally held seven or eight hundred persons. In Poland there were four prisons occupying the space required for one. The prison at Perm was built in 1872 for 120 inmates, but in the same year it held just double that number and the cubical air space allotted to each individual was from 202 to 260 cubic feet, or, as Kropotkin puts it, it was just as if a man was living in a coffin eight feet by six feet. Another authority, the *Journal of Legal Medicine*, issued by the medical department of the Ministry

of the Interior, gives the cubical contents as no more than 124 cubic feet per head. At Tomsk the prison was disgracefully overcrowded. It was built for nine hundred but contained over two thousand souls. At Samara the average prison population was 1,147, but the aggregate cubic capacity of all the prisons in the town was for 552 inmates. At Verkhni Udinsk an *ostrog* built for 140 prisoners was often packed with five hundred and even eight hundred inmates. On the whole, summing up the dreadful facts, an apologist of the Russian government admits that the prisons contain half as many more than the number originally intended.

Let us pass to the direct evidence of a perfectly veracious witness, speaking out of his own experience. George Kennan approached his self-imposed task with a judicial, well-balanced mind, quite unprejudiced against the Russian system, predisposed, if anything, to view it with favour. He paid a lengthy visit to the Tiumen forwarding prison, with the full permission of the authorities, who withheld nothing from his observation, premising only that it was greatly overcrowded and in a bad sanitary condition.

As to the first point, the figures were conclusive. It was a well-known fact that the prison was built originally for 550 inmates but was subsequently enlarged by the addition of detached barracks so as to hold nominally 850 prisoners. On the day Kennan visited it, the number was 1,741, as witnessed

by a blackboard hanging up at the office door. In the first room entered, a *kamera* or cell, 35 feet long, 25 feet wide and 12 feet high, the accommodation and air space at the outside was for forty persons. On the night before, 160 had slept or, more exactly, passed the night in the room. The same dreadful superfluity of human beings existed throughout the entire prison.

"I looked around the cell," says Kennan. "There was practically no ventilation whatever, and the air was so poisoned and foul that I could hardly force myself to breathe it. We visited successively in the yard six *kameras* or cells, essentially like the first, and found in every one of them three or four times the number of prisoners for which it was intended, and five or six times the number for which it had adequate air space. In most of the cells there was not room enough on the sleeping platforms for all of the convicts, and scores of men slept every night on the foul, muddy floors, under the *nary*, 'sleeping platforms,' and in the gangways between them and the walls."

The main building, containing the kitchen, the workshops, the hospital and a large number of *kameras*, was in a worse sanitary condition than the barracks. The air in the corridors and cells, particularly on the second story, was indescribably foul. The oxygen had been breathed again and again; it was laden with fever germs from the unventilated hospital wards, fetid odours from diseased human

lungs and unclean human bodies, and the stench of unmentionable receptacles. "It was like trying to breathe in an underground hospital drain," says Kennan. The kitchen was a dark, dirty room in the basement where three or four half naked cooks were baking large loaves and preparing soup. The bread was sour and heavy, but as good as that usually eaten by Russian peasants; the soup was found to be good and nutritious.

The hospital was on the third floor and the wards were larger and lighter than the *kameras*, but wholly unventilated; no disinfectants were in use, and the air was polluted to the last degree. The prospect of regaining health in such unwholesome dens was small. A man in robust condition must certainly become infected in a few weeks, and there was little hope for the recovery of the sick. All the worst disorders were to be found among the patients; scurvy, typhus fever, typhoid fever, acute bronchitis, rheumatism and syphilis. Only the patients affected by malignant typhus were isolated in a single ward. The women were separated from the men, but that was all. "The patients, both men and women, seemed to be not only desperately sick, but hopeless and heart broken." The mortality was excessive. Typhus was epidemic every year. The prison was uniformly overcrowded; it had been built for eight hundred and generally contained eighteen hundred. Some scanty ventilation was possible when the windows could be opened,

but in the stormy autumn or bitter winter no fresh air could be admitted.

According to the official reports of the inspectors of exile transportation, in the eleven years between 1876 and 1886 the greatest number of deaths in the Tiumen prison hospital was 354, the lowest 175, the average 270. This is an unparalleled death-rate. In various European prisons the rate is on the average as follows:—England, 1.4 per cent.; France, 3.8 per cent.; Austria, 3.5 per cent.; Belgium, 1.8 per cent.; United States, 1.7 per cent. “In the Tiumen forwarding prison it was 29.5 per cent., or almost 300 per thousand. . . . This would entirely annihilate a fixed population in from two and a half to four years,” — a death-rate such as this, in the words of Mr. Cable, “exceeds that of any pestilence that ever fell on Europe in the Middle Ages.”

The female prison was in a separate yard within a high stockade of sharpened logs. The *kameras* were clean and well-lighted; floors and sleeping platforms had been scrubbed; the rooms were not so densely overcrowded, and the air was purer than on the men’s side. But the condition of the third detached prison, that for exiled families, in which men, women and children were herded together to the number of three hundred, was horrible. It was overcrowded; the air was heavy and foul; “dozens of children were crying from hunger and wretchedness; and the men and women looked

tired, sleepless and dejected." All the women were voluntarily accompanying their husbands or fathers into banishment.

The disgraceful state of the Tiumen forwarding prison was perfectly well known to the authorities, and has been strongly commented upon in official reports. How far amendment has proceeded I have no definite information, although we may hope that the diversion of the outward stream of exiles since the opening of the Trans-Siberian railway has greatly reduced the excessive demands upon the imperfect accommodation. But there is another forwarding prison further eastward and at one time on the direct line of exile traffic. This is at the city of Tomsk, which is actually fifty miles distant from the railway, because the local authorities refused to pay the blackmail demanded by the projectors of the line to bring it through, or within easy reach of the city. Before railway days, the convicts travelled in barges on the river Tobol from Tiumen to Tomsk. These barges were planned to accommodate six hundred on each voyage; they were towed by steamers and made the journey in from seven to ten days, completing eighteen trips during the season of open navigation, and thus they transported annually between ten thousand and eleven thousand souls.

If the Tiumen prison was in horrible condition, that of Tomsk was infinitely worse. Its deplorable state was frankly admitted to George Kennan by

the authorities when they granted him permission to visit it. "I think you will find it the worst prison in Siberia," said the acting governor of the province of Tomsk. What else was to be expected when the buildings were filled with more than twice the number of inmates which they could properly accommodate? The Tomsk forwarding prison was designed to hold fourteen hundred, but three thousand or even four thousand were habitually crammed into it. The numbers arriving exceeded the power of distribution, and week by week a residuum remained to increase the permanent population. The *étapes*, or halting stations along the road, could accommodate only a limited number and there were not enough troops to provide for more than one marching party each week.

The Tomsk forwarding prison is described by Mr. Kennan, who saw it in 1885, as, "a stockaded camp or enclosure three acres in extent, lying on open ground outside the city." Within were some fifteen to twenty log buildings grouped about a pyramidal church tower. Each wooden building in the enclosure was a one-storied barrack prison of square logs with board roofs, heavily grated windows and massive iron doors secured with padlocks. There were eight of these, each constituting a prison ward and each divided into two *kameras*, one on each side of a central corridor running through the building. Each ward or building was calculated to hold 190 inmates, but was crowded with at least

three hundred. Each cell was about forty feet square and the air space was seven-eighths of a cubic fathom per head. The cells were fairly well lighted, but the atmosphere was pestilential and the temperature from the natural heat of the prisoners' bodies was fifteen or twenty degrees higher than the external air. The usual sleeping platforms ran across the cells, but there was not room on them for half of the number confined there, and the other half was forced to sleep beneath the platforms, or on the floor in the adjoining gangways. These lay there on the mud-stained and filthy floor, without pillows, blankets or bedclothing. They were in such a grievous state that they complained feelingly of the heat, foulness and oppressiveness of the air and declared that it was impossible to move about in the day time or to get rest at night.

The same evils were present in every cell. But the horrors culminated in the "family" room or *balagan*, the long, low shed of rough pine boards, — a frame work hastily put together and with sides of thin white cotton sheeting. There were three of these crammed full of family parties, men, women and children. The shed was surrounded by a foul ditch half full of filth which soaked through and from under the cotton-sheeting wall. The only light that penetrated within the windowless *balagan* was through this wall of cotton. The place was packed with hundreds of occupants, — "weary-eyed men, haggard women and ailing children," sitting and

lounging about the sleeping platforms and on the broken boards of the floor through which exuded all kinds of abominations. The air was insufferably fetid from the great numbers of infants unwashed and wholly uncared for. Wet underclothing, washed in the camp kettles, was hanging from the beams to dry; an indistinguishable chaos of bags, bundles and domestic utensils encumbered the floor, and the crowd was so closely packed that people could not move without touching each other. No remedy, no alleviation was possible. The cold at night in these cotton enclosed walls, or the damp heat and imperfect ventilation in the bath-house — which many would have preferred — were equally fatal to infant life. Detention in these wretched apologies for shelters was greatly prolonged. No change of clothing was provided; a man wore the same shirt for months, until it almost dropped off, in dirty ragged scraps, full of vermin. Not strangely was it thought a welcome relief when the orders came to take the road. The toilsome march with its incessant hardships and exhausting fatigue was preferable to the fixed residence in a forward-ing prison.

The hospital at Tomsk was in some respects better than that at Tiumen; it occupied a separate building, and was kept in better order. There were always more patients than beds to receive them, and the surplus in various stages of acute disease lay about on benches or on the floor. Despite the over-

crowding, the place was kept fairly clean, the bed clothing was fresh and plentiful and the air was less polluted than at Tiumen. The percentage of the sick varied according to the season. It rose in November, when the population was at its highest, to twenty-five per cent., and among the diseases malignant typhus, the true type of the ancient, but now happily rare, "gaol fever," was always largely present. There were twenty-four hundred cases of illness in the year and at the most crowded time there have been 450 cases in the hospital with beds for only 150 patients.

The prison surgeon, one of the most humane and devoted of his class, Dr. Orzheshko, has described his experience covering fifteen years. In November, he says, "three hundred men and women dangerously sick lay on the floor in rows, most of them without pillows or bed clothing; and in order to find even floor space for them we had to put them so close together that I could not walk between them, and a patient could not cough or vomit without coughing or vomiting into his own face or into the face of the man lying beside him. The atmosphere in the wards became so terribly polluted that I fainted repeatedly upon coming into the hospital in the morning, and my assistants had to revive me by dashing water into my face. In order to change or purify the air, we were forced to keep the windows open; and as winter set in, this so chilled the rooms, that we could not maintain . . . a tem-

perature higher than five or six degrees Réaumur above the freezing point."

This hospital was so saturated with contagious disease that it stood condemned, and deserved to be burned down. Official procrastination delayed its destruction, but in 1887 a sum of 30,000 rubles was granted for the erection of a new hospital, which is, presumably, now occupied. It was high time to make a change. The city of Tomsk, the capital of Siberia, the great centre of Siberian trade, flourishing, prosperous and increasing, naturally became alarmed. The free inhabitants were threatened with the spread of dire epidemic diseases. The local press, defying the censorship, eloquently denounced the horrible condition due to the vast accumulation of excessive numbers in the forwarding prison, and the resultant evils in sickness and mortality. The newspapers stated incontrovertible facts. The death-rate in the city of Tomsk was fifty per thousand per annum, sufficiently large, but in the prison it was three hundred per thousand. Typhus was the predominating disease, accompanied by small-pox, diphtheria, measles and scarlatina. This typhus constituted 56.4 per cent. of all the sickness in the forwarding prison in 1886, 62.6 per cent. in 1887 and 23 per cent. in 1888. The corresponding death-rate in these years was 23.2, 21 and 13.1 per cent.

A violent controversy was aroused between the enterprising and outspoken American investigator,

Mr. George Kennan, and a well-known English explorer, Mr. H. de Windt, who undertook to contest the statements, and, indeed, to deny the facts set forth by Mr. Kennan, plainly condemning them as the phantasy of a disordered imagination and boldly affirming that such a place as the Tomsk forwarding prison "does not exist." Mr. de Windt's arguments are based upon the negative evidence of his own experience. He declares that he saw nothing of the horrors described, but then he never saw or closely inspected the prisons incriminated. He was, no doubt, admitted to certain prisons, which he visited under the auspices of the authorities, and he reported upon them hastily and on imperfect knowledge. Mr. Kennan's painful story is so completely sustained by Russian official reports and the open condemnation of the Siberian press, that it is entitled to full credence and may be relied upon as absolutely trustworthy and conclusive. His account of Tiumen and Tomsk must take a prominent place in the history of penal institutions.

The exile system called the *étapes* or "road prisons" into being. They were very numerous and were planted at intervals of every twenty-five or forty miles, and as this distance was beyond the limit of a single day's march, half-way houses, or *polu étapes*, were to be met with regularly along the road. Each *étape* was the headquarters of a detachment of soldiers who formed the convoy or escort

of the convicts moving eastward. At the *polu étapes* there were no troops. The head of each convoy was a commissioned officer styled the *nachalnik*.

The marching parties covered 330 miles every month, doing from fifteen to twenty miles on two succeeding days and resting on the third. Thus a party leaving Tomsk on Monday morning reached a *polu étape* that night, slept there and passed on to another regular *étape* on Wednesday, where they halted for twenty-four hours. On Thursday the journey was resumed with a fresh escort, a *polu étape* was reached that night, and a regular *étape* the next, and so on, day after day and week after week for many months. Until 1883, there was no separation of the sexes on the march, but after that date single men were excluded from the family parties in which women and children were included. Terrible demoralisation was previously the rule in the constantly overcrowded *étapes*, and the grossest offences were commonly committed.

The departure of a marching party from the forwarding prison was generally fixed at eight o'clock in the morning, when the *telyegas*, or country carts, for the conveyance of the sick and infirm, began to collect in front of the prison gate. Next appeared the prison blacksmith with his anvil and portable forge, to test the fetters as the convicts came forth, and after he had satisfied himself that the rivets were fast and the basils had not been bent, an under officer doled out ten kopecks to each

individual, and the convicts were formed in line, by classes, for convenience of inspection and calling the roll. The hard-labour convicts removed their gray visorless caps to show that their crowns were half shaved according to regulation. From the other sides of their heads hung a mat of long, coarse and dishevelled hair. At length the whole party, numbering from three to four hundred, assembled in the street; each convict carried a gray linen two-bushel bag for the storage of his personal effects. Many possessed tea-kettles, dangling from the waist belts that supported the leg irons, and one or two might be seen with a favourite dog in their arms. All the men were dressed alike in long gray overcoats over coarse linen shirts and loose gray trousers. The women wore no distinctive uniform, but were dressed mostly in peasant costume with gaily coloured handkerchiefs on their heads. Square foot-wrappers of gray linen were used in lieu of stockings and all wore the *koty*, or low shoes, while they lasted, but they were of such rotten, worthless material that they fell to pieces in a couple of days and the wretched wayfarers went barefooted.

The *telyegas* were carts of the rudest description, one-horsed and without springs or seats, and the occupants, sick and suffering, old, infirm and emaciated, lay at the bottom on a scanty layer of grass. A doctor's certificate was essential to secure a place in the carts, and a sharp lookout was kept to weed out the malingerers. In one year more than twenty-

five hundred broken-down persons were conveyed to their destination in as many as 658 carts.

When the column started, the marching party led the van at a brisk pace, followed by the military escort, the carts bearing the sick, and those conveying the gray linen bags. The commanding officer brought up the rear. "This strange procession," says Deutsch, who knew from personal experience, "extends itself along the road for about three-quarters of a mile, and raises clouds of dust." A terrible scourge was the Siberian midge, a pest attacking not only the exposed hands and face but getting into the mouth, nose, ears and eyes, and under the clothing, and inflicting unendurable irritation. The pace maintained was at the rate of two miles an hour. After traversing ten miles, a halt was called for rest and the noon-day meal. The effort was little for the able-bodied, but for the weaker, laden with chains and bundles, the long march was most exhausting, and all gladly flung themselves on the ground, wet or dry. A spot was chosen at the entrance of some village, and its residents came forth to haggle and huckster over the sale of coarse food, such as black rye bread, fish pies, hard boiled eggs, milk and *kvas*, or sour country beer. Prices varied, and no attempt was made to control them officially; they were liable to be extortionate at seasons of scarcity, after bad harvests, and the government allowance was at times ludicrously inadequate, barely enough to satisfy

hunger. Besides, the average convict is an inveterate gambler, and many became penniless risking and losing the whole of their allowance. Then they would beg by the roadside, as already described. After a short hour's pause, the march was resumed, a second ten miles was painfully covered, and it was almost dark when the halt for the night was reached, whether at an *étape* or *polu étape*.

There was little to choose between the *étapes* and the *polu étapes*, but the latter were smaller and the accommodation was consequently worse. Both were stockaded enclosures, containing three or more long, low, one-story buildings. One of these was the commanding officer's quarters, a second was for the soldiers of the escort, and the remaining hut or huts formed the prison. Each was divided into two or three cells; each was furnished with the usual plank sleeping platforms in a double row, and a brick stove. The available space was much too small for the prisoners passing through as these halting prisons were built for about half the number. "All of these," says an official report, "are not only too small, but old and decayed and demand capital repairs." The governor-general of Eastern Siberia, Anuchin, reported confidentially in 1880, to the Czar, Alexander III, that all prisons he had visited, including the *étapes*, were tumbled-down buildings in a lamentable sanitary condition; that they were cold in winter and saturated with miasma; that the prisons of the empire generally, with the

exception of the principal ones recently erected, were not remarkable for their good qualities, but the Siberian prisons were particularly bad because they were built quickly, with insufficient means, and almost wholly without supervision of any kind. Only one architect had been employed and his sphere of action was so wide that he paid only a rare visit to new works in progress. The contractors departed from the original plans and evaded conditions, so that the work was continually neglected. In the first place the money was insufficient, after a portion of the government appropriation had been stolen by fraudulent contractors and corrupt officials, and the new *étapes* were run up without stone foundations, so that the walls soon "settled" and the buildings rapidly deteriorated under climatic agencies and the injurious wear and tear of the constant overcrowding. In temperate weather half the prisoners slept on the ground in the outer courtyard, but when it was too inclement they filled the *kameras*, lay about the corridors and packed themselves into the garrets. Not the smallest care was taken to make places habitable. Dirt accumulated everywhere; no provision had been made for ventilation, and the windows would not even open. Occupation of quarters was a matter of force, when the weakest went to the wall.

On arrival at an *étape*, generally in the afternoon, a halt was called outside the palisade for roll-call, and then the great gates were thrown open for the

indiscriminate admission of the crowd. "With a wild, mad rush and a furious clashing of chains, more than three hundred men made a sudden break for the narrow gateway, struggled, fought and crowded through it, and then burst into the *kameras*, in order to secure, by preoccupation, places on the sleeping platforms," says Kennan. Leo Deutsch graphically describes this "battle for the best sleeping places, the weaker being thrust aside or trampled down by the stronger. At our first sight of this mad fighting and struggling among some hundred men in a narrow space, we thought they would kill each other, but generally the wild tumult of blows and kicks and curses did not result in anything serious." The losers in the game took the worst places, or bartered for a better bed with the more fortunate at the price of a few kopecks.

When the scramble for a night's lodging ended, the tired wayfarers fell to preparing their own suppers. Hot water for making tea was retailed by the soldiers of the escort, and cooked food with coarse bread was bought from the market women who came in to sell their wares. Sometimes they did not appear and the convicts would almost starve, or the times were hard and impossible prices were charged. The daily allowance issued by the authorities was sometimes insufficient, and again the convicts went short. Often enough the buyers cheated the sellers, or stole their goods, and the poor women could get no redress. After supper, roll was again

called, the watch was set, sentries were posted, and the prisoners were locked up and left for the night.

The *étape* at Achinsk, for instance, between Tomsk and Krasnoyarsk, is described by a newspaper of Irkutsk as "a *cloaca* where human beings perish like flies. Typhus fever, diphtheria and other epidemic diseases prevail there constantly, and infect all who have the misfortune to get into that awful place," and a St. Petersburg newspaper says, "There one doctor has on his hands more than three hundred sick." A correspondent wrote to a Tomsk journal, "As soon as you enter the courtyard of the prison you notice the contaminated, miasmatic air. . . . Dante himself would have thrown down his pen if he had been required to describe the damp, cold, dilapidated cells of this prison. At night myriads of bed-bugs torture every prisoner into a condition not far removed from frenzy. The prison sometimes has six hundred inmates and to its filth and disorder are attributable the typhus fever, diphtheria and other diseases that spread from it, as from a pit of contagion, to the population of the city." In the Isham *étape*, the cold was intense and the exiles arriving had no warm clothing. One man was frozen to death on the road. At Cheremkhovsky the air space which was barely enough for two persons had to serve for thirty. It was described by a prisoner as "a grave and not a prison." At Kirinsk, the building of decayed logs would have fallen down had it not been

shored up by other logs equally rotten. A prisoner, to show the state of the wood, thrust his fingers out of sight into the wall.

We have seen how the marching parties were accompanied by a large contingent of sick who were unfit to travel and yet could not be left behind, sometimes even at the point of death. They were compelled to sit all day in a cramped position in the rude carts, intensifying the already acute pains of their often mortal ailments, and were exposed to all conditions of the weather. When dry and warm, they were enveloped in clouds of dust, causing intolerable discomfort, especially in the case of disease of the respiratory organs; when cold and inclement, still worse dangers attended the exposure to snow and wintry winds. No change into dry clothing on arrival was feasible, for with inconceivable carelessness the baggage was allowed to become soaked through on the road. The baggage carts were unprovided with cover even by tarpaulins. Thus the sickly, in the worst stages of illness, were forced to lie down upon the same platforms, side by side with the more robust, to whom they quickly passed the contagion of their diseases. In the rare cases when the *étape* was provided with a lazaret, newcomers who were ill might fare better, but the average *étape* hospital was infamously bad.

The indictment against the Czar and his government for their brutal defiance of the commonest rules of humanity has been more than substantiated

by the deplorable facts set forth in the previous pages. It is agreeable to note some disposition to mend matters on the part of the supreme authorities. Certain reforms in prison administration have been introduced in recent years, showing that the autocrat of all the Russias has not continued utterly indifferent to the sufferings of Siberian exiles and convicts. Widespread radical changes have been impossible; the evils were too deep seated and too extensive for general removal; but one or two new prisons have been erected, more in accord with the dictates of penitentiary science and aiming at partial improvement. A brief account of one or two of these may serve to relieve somewhat the gloomy picture which has been by no means over-coloured.

The Czars Alexander II and III could not plead ignorance of the horrible conditions prevailing in Eastern Siberia which were brought unmistakably to their notice by the reports of Anuchin in 1880 and 1882. Some of his condemnatory remarks have already been quoted and may be repeated here as summing up his final verdict. After minute inquiry and much investigation, he characterises the Siberian prisons as follows: "The exile system and penal servitude in Eastern Siberia are in the most unsatisfactory state . . . while the exile bureaus in the provinces are not organised in a manner commensurate with the importance of the work that they have to do and are prejudicial rather than useful to the service." The Czar Alexander III was so

deeply impressed with the necessity for reform that he endorsed on this report in his own handwriting, "I should greatly like to do this and it seems to me indispensable." Events proved too strong however even for the autocrat ruler of all the Russias. He says: "I have read this report with great interest, and I am more than troubled by this melancholy but just description of the government's forgetfulness of a country so rich and so necessary to Russia." On the part dealing with prisons the Czar endorsed the words, "A melancholy but not a new picture." On a later page I shall go further into the ameliorations and improvements attempted since 1886.

CHAPTER VII

VAGABONDAGE AND UNIONS

Peculiar phases of criminality to be found in Siberian prisons — Country overrun with convict fugitives — Terrible privations suffered by these vagrants — The "call of the cuckoo" — The vagrants known as "brodyagi" — Number of runaway convicts in the summer months said to exceed thirty thousand — The formation of the "artel" or union in all companies of convicts — The power and methods of the "Ivans" or recidivists in the "artel" — Leo Deutsch's story — Life of the politicals in the Middle Kara state prison — The "Sirius" or student who worked during the night — The humane governor, Colonel Kanonovich — He resigns rather than obey the government's orders that the prisoners should be perpetually chained to wheelbarrows.

CERTAIN types of criminals and some peculiar phases of criminality have grown up in Russian, and especially in Siberian prisons. They are mainly due to the negation of proper penitentiary principles and the absence of any fixed methods of treatment. Callous indifference has generally alternated with brutal repression and savage, disciplinary punishments. The chief result has been the growth of classes of criminals seldom seen elsewhere. The so-called "habitual offender" is to be met with strongly developed and in a peculiarly vicious form in Siberia. The whole country is overrun with fugitive convicts who have made good their escape in various fash-

ions. Some have run from the marching parties, carrying their lives in their hands as they braved the bullets of the generally straight-shooting soldiers of the escort; others have successfully evaded the police at remote points of settlement as established exiles; not a few have benefited by the exchange of identity with some one who remained behind. All have become wild men of the woods, the terror of all peaceable members of society whom they may come across in the scattered settlements or single houses of the sparsely inhabited districts. Many thousands of these vagrants are at large in the summer months, when they may live in the open air and subsist as best they can on what they find or steal. Large numbers are recaptured; many perish from cold and starvation when winter approaches; many more give themselves up voluntarily to save their lives, accepting the severest flogging or a new sentence as the penalty of their escape.

Yet they are incorrigible wanderers and pass their lives in short periods of freedom and longer doses of confinement. When Kennan saw a marching party start, he was shown convicts who were treading the dolorous road for the sixth time. The captain of the escort assured him that he had known cases in which the journey had been repeated sixteen times. In other words, the vagrant had crossed Siberia just thirty-two times on foot, and had, therefore, walked as much as if he had twice made the circuit of the globe at the Equator.

The passionate craving for freedom has been well described by Dostoyevski. "At the first song of the lark throughout all Siberia and Russia, men set out on the tramp; God's creatures, if they can break their prison and escape into the woods. . . . They go vagabondising where they please, wherever life seems to them most agreeable and easy; they drink and eat what they can find; at night they sleep undisturbed and without a care in the woods or in a field; . . . saying good night only to the stars; and the eye that watches them is the eye of God. It is not altogether a rosy lot: sometimes they suffer hunger and fatigue 'in the service of General Cuckoo.' Often enough the wanderers have not a morsel of bread to keep their teeth going for days at a time. . . . They are almost all brigands and thieves by necessity rather than inclination. . . . This life in the woods, wretched and fearful as it is, but still free and adventurous, has a mysterious seduction for those who have experienced it."

A curious illustration of this consuming passion is to be found in the case of an aged convict who had become the servant of a high official at the Kara gold mines. This man ran away periodically at the return of spring, and although suffering always the same terrible privations, was brought back in irons. At last, at the fateful moment, he came to his master and begged that he might be locked up. "I am a *brodyaga*, heart and soul, quite irreplaceable, and I cannot resist the cuckoo's call.

Please do me the favour to put me under lock and key so that I cannot go off." He was closely confined until the summer passed, and when the fever of unrest left him, he was released and became quiet, contented and docile as ever. A convict who has earned conditional freedom and received a grant of land, may have married, had children and lived quietly for some years, when suddenly some day he will have disappeared, abandoning wife and family, to the stupefaction of everybody. Vagrancy is in his blood. He probably was a deserter before his conviction; the passion for wandering has always possessed him. He has hungered after a change of lot, and nothing would hold him, not even his family, much less police surveillance or prison bars.

The largest number of these vagabonds, or "passportless" men, as they are called, have begun at the earliest opportunity to make a break for liberty while on the road between the *étapes*. As the party was being marshalled after the midday rest, or when it reached some defile or stretch of broken ground, a simultaneous dash was made by several through the marching cordon of guards. Fire was then opened instantaneously, and one or more of the fugitives fell while the rest got away. If the rush was made near some wood and cover could be gained, the escape was successful. The first step on reaching a safe shelter was to remove the leg irons by pounding the basils into an oblong shape with a stone. Then the fugitive's face was turned

westward toward the Ural Mountains, and one or two might by chance reach European Russia.

As a rule, they travel along byways and tracks known only to themselves through the *taiga*, or primeval forest, but they sometimes boldly appear upon the great highways to Moscow. They are often to be met with in couples or small bands, still in their prison rags, skirting the forest and keeping near the edge so as to hide quickly at the first alarm. Before the days of the railway, they would engage in conversation with friends in any passing party of convicts on the march, and even dared to salute the officers, who might know them perfectly but who would not interfere with them. Life is often very hard with them, but the Siberian peasants are usually charitable, partly from religious feeling, but not a little from fear, for the *brodyaga* is vindictive and capable of showing his ill-will murderously. The doors of dwelling houses are kept fast shut, but food is often placed outside on the window-sill, — a piece of bread and cheese or a bowl of thickened milk. Sometimes the bath-house, at a little distance, in a detached building, is left open to give a night's shelter, but it is dangerous to admit a tramp into the main residence. Leo Deutsch tells the following story of the unfortunate results of incaution. It is from the lips of one of the principal actors.

"We'd been a few days on the road when one stormy night we came to a village. It was pouring in torrents, and we could find nobody who would

let us in, till at last an old man opened the door of his hut. We begged him in God's name to give us shelter. 'Well,' he said, 'will you promise to leave us old folks in peace?' 'What do you take us for, grandfather?' said we. 'Have pity on us!' So he let us in, and the old woman gave us something to eat, and they allowed us to lie on the stove by turns. Well, they went to sleep and we just *did for them*, and went off with everything that could be of any use to us. We didn't get far: the peasants came after us and caught us; and then there was the usual game: trial and sentence to penal servitude."

Frequently the recaptured *brodyaga* is sentenced to only a few years' penal servitude, when he was originally sentenced for a much longer period, and thus escape not only gives him freedom for a time, but considerably lessens his punishment even after a second or third trial. This is the result of the impossibility of establishing the identity of persons arrested without passports, but the difficulty has largely disappeared in recent years with the more systematic methods of photographing the convicts.

The *brodyagi* were Ishmaelites against whom every hand was turned. The people of Siberia showed them little mercy and constantly hunted them down simply to rob them of anything they possessed. It was better than chasing an antelope, they said; the beast had only one skin, the convict had two; his coat, his shirt, boots and clothes, and

something in his pockets. Again — quoting from Deutsch — there was the case of a tramp who had engaged himself as a labourer during the winter months. When paid his wages, a mere pittance, he wandered forth; his late master pursued him, shot him from behind a bush and repossessed himself of the money. The Siberian woods held many unrecognised corpses, about whom no questions were asked. Life is cheap in the great convict land.

With the advent of spring, when approaching summer renders life in the woods bearable, the “free commands,” comprising persons sentenced to simple banishment or conditionally released, begin to overflow into the forests, and a constant stream of fugitives bent upon changing their lot sets westward. The signal for the start is the first note of the cuckoo; hence the prison synonym for an escape is “to go to General ‘Kukushka’ for orders.” They pass around Lake Baikal, climbing the high, barren mountains that surround it, or they cross it on a raft or empty fish cask. Their fires are to be seen in the distance guiding the hunters who are out to avenge some new outrage of the runaways.

It is estimated that the numbers of vagabonds at large in the summer months exceed thirty thousand. By far the larger part of these reappear at the convicts’ settlements when winter arrives. They are not recognised and have steadfastly refused to recollect their proper names, so one and all are provided with the same appellation of “Ivan Dontremem-

ber," — a large family, and the name carries with it the penalty of five years' hard labour. When deportation to Saghalien was later adopted on a large scale, the hope was entertained that the fever for escape would in a measure be cured by the difficulties and dangers of the savage conditions of that wild and distant land. The prison administration strongly recommended that the most incorrigible runaways should be interned on that convict settlement, where, hemmed in by sea and ice, they were cut off from the mainland of Asia and circumscribed in their bids for freedom. The Saghalien *brodyagi*, however, have been as active for evil and as irrepressible as in Siberia; they have worked in gangs, and rendered more desperate by the poverty of the country and the greater difficulties of subsistence, they have become more recklessly criminal. Fugitives who had broken prison joined forces and terrorised whole districts, attacking posts and settlements, committing the worst outrages, and long defying pursuit and recapture. More detailed accounts of the prevailing lawlessness in Saghalien belong to a later date.

The multiplication of escapes by the most desperate characters in Siberia, and their almost inevitable recapture and reconviction, developed some detestable features in prison life. If anything were needed to emphasise the misuse of the comparatively innocent victims of Russian oppression, it will be found in the permitted predominance of the worst

elements. The best were forever at the mercy of the worst; the hardened miscreants ruled the prisons; they might not be in the majority, but they depended upon the strength that came with combination of the truculent and masterful banded together. Where convicts gathered together in any number the first step was the organisation of the *artel*, or "union," which governed the rest with irresistible despotism. In the days of marching by road the union was generally formed at the first halting place, when a *starosta*, or "chief," was forthwith elected by the prisoners from among their own body, and nominally by the vote of the majority. But the decision lay really with the "Ivans," the recidivists who had been in exile before; the old, experienced rogues and vagabonds, who imposed their will upon their comrades through their nominee. It was the ruthless rule of a secret oligarchy, wielding despotic and irresponsible power entirely in its own interests. The individual prisoner sacrificed his personal rights to gain the protection of the association which pretended to stand between him and the authorities. The union had funds acquired by means of a tax assessed on the whole body, and from other sources of revenue, such as the sale by auction to the highest bidder of the privilege of keeping a sutler's shop where tea, sugar and white bread were sold openly, and where tobacco, playing cards and intoxicating liquor might be secretly purchased.

The will of the *artel* was law; its functions were far-reaching and its authority absolute over all the members. It worked secretly and out of sight, securing its ends by astute devices and a free use of bribes to officers and soldiers, and by utilising the knowledge that it was backed up by the whole number of prisoners. Among its duties were concerting plans of escape with the requisite assistance; the suborning of the executioner to flog lightly; the hiring of *telyegas* and sleighs for conveyance by the road of those who could pay for the privilege, frequently to the exclusion of the really weak and suffering; the bribery of all officials; and the enforcement of all contracts and agreements among the prisoners. It had its own unwritten code, its own standard of honour and obligation, its own penalties. A member might commit almost any crime, provided he was loyal and obedient to the organisation; if he betrayed it or revealed its secrets, no matter under what compulsion, he was already a dead man. The whole continent of Asia could not hide or save the unfaithful exile. If condemned by the pitiless tribunal, his fate would certainly overtake him somehow, somewhere, even at a long distance from the scene of his offence. The traitors might secure the protection of the authorities and live altogether in the strictest solitude, but immunity was only secured for a time. The blow would fall eventually. Kennan quotes two cases, in one of which the victim was choked to death on

board a convict steamer on the voyage to Saghalien, and in the other, he was found dead, with his throat cut, in a Caucasian *étape*.

The chief of the union was a person of great importance; he had the whole strength of the society at his back and was the recognised intermediary with the authorities. An astute convoy officer would enter into relations with him, and in return for a promise that no escapes would be attempted, winked at the removal of leg irons on the road, which, as has been said, the wearer could always accomplish by altering the shape of the anklets. Even a high official, no less a personage than the inspector-general of exiles, would make a cash contribution to the funds of the *artel* to secure this same promise. If any daring convict should then escape, the union was eager to effect the recapture, either of the actual fugitive or of some runaway found at large. The ultimate fate of the fugitive has already been indicated.

The *artel*, acting through its leaders, the "Ivans," who helped the *starosta* to his place and practically controlled him, claimed the right to enforce the strict observance of the agreements made between convicts, and especially in regard to "swops," or the exchange of identities, with all the attributes and responsibilities attaching to each. In recent years, great pains have been taken to prevent this by such means as the obligation to carry photographs and personal description which are constantly compared

with the individual. But the exchanges were long made with impunity, facilitated by the loose system prevailing. Every marching party consisted of two principal classes; the convicts sentenced to imprisonment with hard labour, and the *ssylny*, sentenced to exile only as forced colonists. The penalties are quite unequal, and many of those doomed to suffer the most severe would be glad to exchange positions with the colonists when any could be induced to accept the heavier burden. There were many such; it was only a question of price, and that was not generally high; often a ridiculously small compensation sufficed and the bargain was soon made.

There are in every exile party a number of abject creatures, degraded gamblers, who have lost their clothing (government property) and mortgaged their food allowance for weeks ahead, and who will sell their souls for a few rubles and a bottle of vodka. Such a creature will listen greedily to the overtures of the more prosperous convict, who has won or saved money on the road, and who tempts with splendid offers: a warm overcoat, five rubles and a few glasses of drink as the price of his personality. The bribe is backed up by specious arguments. The new convict might console himself with the thought that he need not remain long at hard labour. When duly arrived at his destination in the mining settlements, or at some great prison, he had only to declare that he was not the man he pretended to be. He would confess, in fact, that he had fraudulently

exchanged with another, whom he named but who could not be found. The first act of the sham exile would be to escape from the village in which he was interned and to get lost in the *taiga*. The false convict might be held for a time and subjected to a severe flogging and a term of imprisonment, after which he could count upon release as an ordinary exile.

This is no fanciful story. Cases were of constant occurrence. Leo Deutsch, when on his way to the Kara mines, was seriously approached by a comrade on the march, who suggested an exchange and showed unblushingly how it might be carried out. This man was a veteran "Ivan," a criminal aristocrat and dandy among his fellows; he wore a white shirt with a gay tie under his gray overcoat, and a brightly coloured scarf round his waist, to which his chains were cleverly attached so that they did not rattle or incommode him when walking. The suggestion was nothing less than a cold-blooded murder. The substitute to be provided was to have some personal resemblance to Deutsch, and would take his place with the other politicals one day, and disappear the next. When his body should be picked up presently in a neighbouring stream, it would be supposed that Deutsch had committed suicide, while in reality, still alive and hearty, he was to be disguised as the substitute who had been permanently "removed" to make a place for him. The price of this atrocity was a few rubles, twenty or thirty at

most, and the blood money was to be divided among the murderers, with a large contribution to the revenues of the union.

It was to the interest of the *artel* to encourage these exchanges and insist upon their punctual performance. The substitute was never permitted to back out of his bargain. He generally belonged to the class contemptuously styled "biscuits," and the name suited these pale, emaciated creatures, the pariahs of the party, upon whom fell all the dirty, disagreeable jobs. These poor wretches had lost all power of will, and cared for nothing but the cards that had been their ruin. They stole all they could lay their hands on, except from the "Ivans," who would have retaliated with a murderous thrashing, justified on the ground that the thief had stolen from his own people. The condition of these "biscuits" was heart-rending, especially in bad weather, when, clothed in rags that barely covered their nakedness, they ran rather than walked on the line of march so as to keep themselves warm. Their only pleasure was in gambling, when anything and everything was staked, even the government clothing for which they were responsible and for losing which they were punished cruelly.

Next in importance to the chief, the storekeeper was a prominent official in the union. He had bought his place, bidding the highest price for it when put up at auction, and he had acquired the exclusive right to sell provisions to the prisoners,

and to supply them secretly with tobacco, spirits and playing cards. The last mentioned were in constant use and the games were eagerly watched. When a winner was lucky, it was customary for him to stand treat to his starving comrades. The store-keeper also, on the expiration of his office, would entertain everyone with a feast when the prisoners would hungrily eat their fill, crying, "It is the store-keeper who pays."

There is now, however, little chance of any such extended organisation among the convicts on the journey or in the forwarding prisons. The officials have learned how to prevent and break up such combinations and more recent regulations have rendered them inoperative. So the old *brodyagi* must lament for the good old days and the power that they once exercised.

Some curious details of the organisation of the *artel* in the Middle Kara, or state prison for politicals, are given by Leo Deutsch. It was formed for domestic administration and was worked fairly and equitably for the general good. Coöperation was the leading principle. All issues of food, the daily rations for the whole number, were collected and afterward divided with such additions as were provided out of a common fund obtained by general contribution of moneys received by prisoners from their friends at home. This fund was expended in three ways: one part went to the "stock pot" as explained above, to supplement the food; a second

was applied to help prisoners about to be released; and the third was divided as pocket money among the whole number, to be spent according to individual taste, in buying small luxuries or books approved by the authorities. The *starosta* kept strict account; no actual money passed hands; paper orders circulated and were debited to each member on a monthly balance sheet, with the result brought out as "plus" or "minus." It was the same as in ordinary life; some thriftless people were always in debt; the impecunious hoped to get clear at Christmas time when gifts came in, but if still on the wrong side, the "minus" was "whitewashed" by the consent of the *artel* but not always with the concurrence of the debtor, who was sometimes too proud to accept the favour.

Under this union, life in common was admirably organised, with a division of labour and a regular roster of employment. Work was of two classes; for private purposes, and for the general good. The former included washing of clothes and mending, the latter cooking, cleaning, attending to the steam bath and the various domestic services. No pains were spared to insure cleanliness. All rooms occupied by the prisoners were scrupulously washed and kept tidy; the bed-boards and floors were regularly scrubbed with hot water; the beds were aired; tables and benches were washed in the yard; all sanitary appliances were thoroughly disinfected. Proper ventilation was insisted upon, and close at-

'tention was paid to hygienic conditions. All worked cheerfully, and illness only was allowed as an exemption. The cooking was done by groups of five each which served for a week at a time. A head cook, an assistant cook for invalids, and two helpers made up the group. This was hard work, fatiguing while it lasted, but a relief to the monotonous life. The kitchen became a sort of club-house, where men came to laugh and jest and play practical jokes, a pleasant change in their gruesome existence. The dietary was meagre and little varied on account of dearth of materials. Thin soup and black bread was the staple food, but the soup-meat was often served as a separate dish with great ingenuity, a favourite method being to mince it with groats. This dish was nicknamed "Every-one-likes-it," and it was joyfully welcomed on the days it appeared on the bill of fare. Another favourite dish was the *pirog*, a sort of "resurrection pie," containing scraps saved up during the week. Except on rare holidays, when roast meat and white bread were supplied out of the fund, the food was neither nutritious nor appetising. But many of the cooks were skilful, — worthy, as the prisoners declared, of "better houses." The cook's perquisite was the issue of a rather increased portion of food.

Certain officials were appointed by the *artel*. A "bread issuer" cut up the loaves and served them out to the different rooms; it was his duty also to collect the scraps, even to the crumbs, and send them

to the "free command," where ex-prisoners in semi-liberation resided; and the pieces helped to feed the horses and two cows, the property of the union. There was a poultry man, too, who took charge of the fowls, which were raised and tended most carefully. Two bath-keepers were in charge of the steam bath, the one luxury in the prison, indulgence in which once a week afforded a short period of delightful ease and comfort. What the bath meant to the convicts in the Omsk *ostrog* has already been described.

One of the most important offices was that of librarian of the prison. He was elected by ballot. By degrees the library at Kara had reached a large number of volumes, partly brought in by prisoners, partly sent from Russia, always with permission. It contained many standard works in several languages; history, mathematics and natural science were largely represented; the books were well cared for and cleverly rebound by self-taught workmen. The librarian at Kara was long a political named Vladimir Tchuikov, a youth who had been condemned to twenty years' hard labour for being in correspondence with a remarkable woman revolutionist, who was long buried alive in the Schlüsselburg fortress. It was also charged against him that he was found in possession of implements for printing and manufacturing false passports, and of a list of subscriptions to the journal, *Will of the People*. As a librarian he was invaluable; he had a prodig-

ious memory and could indicate any article on any given subject which had appeared in a certain work or pile of newspapers.

Leo Deutsch describes the effect made upon him by Tchuikov at their first meeting. "I noted their youthful but worn faces (Tchuikov and Spandoni); both of them wore spectacles and on their heads were round caps with no brims. With their yellow sheepskins and rattling chains, my comrades gave one the impression that they could not be real convicts, but were just dressed up for the part — so great was the contrast between their refined faces and behaviour and this uncouth disguise."

Other officials under this coöperative association were the general "dividers," one for each room, whose duty was to parcel out with great care every atom of food, and especially the tid-bits arriving from friends, which he divided honourably and exactly. He was also the carver for the room. As has been said, the utmost generosity prevailed; no prisoner claimed to retain any gifts he received from outside; all linen, clothing, and boots were handed over to the chief, and their final possession was decided by lot, their nature being first declared, so that any one in need might put in a claim to draw for them.

Some further details of the common life at this time in the Middle Kara state prison will be found interesting. All the inmates were more or less acquainted with one another; all were comrades de-

voted to a common cause. Youth was a general characteristic, and its buoyancy and sanguine spirit animated every one. Light-hearted conversation, with jokes and laughter, were not unknown; free association was not forbidden; the prisoners were not locked up singly or confined to a particular room, but were at liberty to run to and fro exchanging ideas and sometimes news when it came in, which was but rarely.

Each room had its nickname, the survival of a dim and distant past. One was called the "Sanhedrin," another the "Yakutsk," a third the "Volost," and a fourth the "Nobles' room." There was always a large contingent of clever and well educated young men among the politicals, but the popular idea of the lesser officials that they were all nobles, princes and counts was ridiculously far-fetched. Still, they profited by the civility and consideration accorded to them. Many were deeply read; many were members of the universities who were eager to improve themselves. Some of them were known as "Siriuses," a prison name given to the ardent students, who worked in the middle of the night, taking advantage of the hours of perfect stillness broken only by the snores of the sleepers. The "Sirius" turned in early in the evening when the noisy chatter of many voices was disturbing to study, but he could sleep through it and, waking at midnight, would light the shaded lamp at his table and work till dawn. Then when Sirius, star of the

morning, arose, he again took a short rest for a couple of hours.

The attainments of these students sometimes reached a high standard; they were proficient in metaphysics, abstruse mathematics, or languages, and professors in each of these branches were glad to take pupils. Marvellous skill in handicrafts was also acquired, mainly from books of technical instruction, and lessons in theory were admirably applied in practice. One clever workman constructed a pocket lathe out of a few old rusty nails, and by its help fashioned all the parts of a clock which kept good time, although he was no watchmaker. The possession of the tools required for these productions was forbidden by the rules, and they were kept out of sight when the regular searches and inspections were made. When the rules in this respect were relaxed, there was a great development in arts and crafts, a vise was set up in one of the rooms, and an amateur photographer opened a regular studio.

A mechanical genius, an original and inventive character, was prominent among the politicals at this period. He was Leo Zlatopolski, a student of the Technological Institute of St. Petersburg, who had joined the revolutionary party and through his mechanical skill had been of great assistance in the manufacture of bombs. Prison seclusion had stimulated his inventive powers. He designed a flying machine and planned a circular town, in which

everything was to be run by electricity, but he did not despise working for the improvement of domestic appliances, such as new schemes for the boiling of potatoes and the making of shoes. He had advanced theories for the heating of dwellings; he invented new games of cards and aspired to regenerate and reorganise daily life. But none of his schemes were practical, and his comrades made him their butt, although he was really a very capable and learned man. The activity and productiveness of the political prisoners reminds us of the same qualities exhibited in the Omsk *ostrog* as described by Dostoyevski.

Other amusements were much indulged in during the more troublous times. Chess was played in the long, dismal, and monotonous hours, and by first class performers who had studied the game scientifically. There were well-contested tournaments, the result of which excited lively interest. Music was greatly cultivated, and the prison choir had a large repertory of the now widely popular Russian composers. One of the gifted handicraftsmen constructed a very passable violin which was constantly in use, and less ambitious performers were proficient with the simple hair-comb. Physical exercise was obtained within the prison enclosure during the winter on snow slides, after the fashion of the modern toboggan at fashionable winter resorts in Europe.

The relegation of political offenders to the Kara

mines began in 1873, but did not become a regular practice till 1879, when the terrorists' propaganda seriously alarmed the Russian government. It was then resolved to subject the worst cases to penal servitude under the same painful conditions as common criminals, with whom they worked side by side at the gold placers. This was no child's play, but it was not unendurable. On the contrary, the daily egress from prison for six or eight hours into sunshine and open air was much appreciated. For some time the supreme power at Kara was wielded by the humane and rightly esteemed Colonel Kanonovich, during whose mild régime the prisoners enjoyed the privileges detailed above. But with the changed temper of the government and the increased severity decreed, Colonel Kanonovich proved restive and declined to give effect to the new orders. He had already protested against some of the penalties enforced, especially that of chaining to wheelbarrows, and although he was unable to abolish it or relieve those subjected to it without permission from St. Petersburg, he gave orders that whenever he visited the prisons all suffering that inhumane punishment should be released from the wheelbarrows for the time so that his eyes might not be offended by the sight.

This savage and abominable practice, although discontinued on the Siberian continent, is still authorised by law, and is constantly inflicted at Saghalien on convicts condemned to a life sentence.

The penalty consists in making a prisoner fast to a small miner's wheelbarrow by means of a chain attached to the middle link of the leg irons. While the chain is long enough to allow of freedom of movement, the victim cannot take any exercise, nor cross his cell without trundling his wheelbarrow in front of him. One political offender, Shchedrin, indignant at the gross misconduct of Colonel Soliviof, adjutant to the governor-general of Trans-Baikal, struck him in the face. This man was sentenced to the wheelbarrow and was sent back to Russia to be imprisoned in the Schlüsselburg. He travelled across Asia fastened to his wheelbarrow, even when in a vehicle. When jolted on the rough roads, he was so much bruised by his barrow that it was found necessary to unchain him and lash the implement behind the cart, and this strange spectacle was witnessed by many. Shchedrin became insane in the "stonebags" of Schlüsselburg, and he died eventually in an insane asylum. At night it was necessary to hoist the wheelbarrow into such a position as to allow the sleeper to lie alongside.

A high-souled, chivalrous man of the stamp of Colonel Kanonovich could not bear to witness the miseries of his charges unmoved. He was not a revolutionist, nor in sympathy with the reforming spirit, but he was willing to admit that many of the political offenders were disinterested patriots and that there were among them numbers of refined and cultivated men and women. He treated them,

as I have tried to show, with kindness and consideration, and sought to lighten and brighten their grievous lot. When at last he saw that he was to be employed as an intermediary for the infliction of fresh tortures, he resolved to resign rather than be responsible for them. He wrote boldly to his superiors saying he was not a hangman, and that he would not do violence to his feelings by enforcing the cruel orders recently issued. When his resignation was accepted, and he was recalled to St. Petersburg, he was sharply taken to task by Governor-General Anuchin as he passed through Irkutsk.

"No one holding your views," said this great official, "could expect to retain his appointment as chief of the Kara prisons and mines. I question whether any one like you can hold a post in the government service." "Very well," was the sturdy reply, "then I will get out of it forthwith. The government has imposed an impossible duty on me, and I cannot perform it and keep an approving conscience."

Colonel Kanonovich fortunately had many influential friends, and the accusations brought against him could not injure him permanently. He was an officer of the Cossacks and was appointed to another command in the Trans-Baikal, and later promoted to be a general officer, in charge of the enlarged penal colony of Saghalien. He also supervised the erection of the new Verkhni Udinsk prison, in which

a praiseworthy and conspicuous effort at reform was subsequently made. The building of the political prison at Middle Kara was under his direction, but he left just before it was occupied and was in no wise responsible for the atrocities committed there.

CHAPTER VIII

TREATMENT OF POLITICALS

Withdrawal of privileges accorded to politicals — Lunatics confined in association with other prisoners — Suicides — Many escapes attempted — Fresh deprivations — The politicals separated and confined in common prisons of the Kara district — Subjected to "dungeon conditions" — Much disease — Finally transferred to the state prison — Hunger strike which lasted thirteen days — Some remarkable female revolutionists — A hunger strike instituted by the women — Attempts to pacify them — The resignation of the governor Masyukov demanded — Madame Sigida strikes Masyukov in the face — Subjected to flogging and dies — Three of her companions commit suicide — Thirteen of the men determine to put an end to their lives — Governors, good and bad — Deutsch's account of Nikolin's régime — The atrocities committed by the governor Patrin at Saghalien.

THE changed attitude of the government toward the state prisoners at Kara dated, as we have said, from the end of the year 1880, under the initiative of Loris Melikov, and this action, so inconsistent with his supposed views as a liberal minister, has never been explained. Kennan suggests that it was caused by bad advice, carelessly adopted. But, as Leo Deutsch tells us, the harsh régime was introduced at a time when the revolutionary agitation had revived in great strength, and the dominant bureaucracy was

more than ever on the defensive, ready to wreak its revengeful feelings upon the captives it held in dur-
ance. In any case, the orders issued evidenced a retrograde policy and a revival of the old methods of repression with new punishments superadded. All existing privileges, even the most trivial, were withdrawn. A peremptory stop was put to all correspondence with relatives and friends; work in the open air for ordinary criminal convicts was forbidden; and all the politicals who had finished their sentences of imprisonment and were living in the "free command" were again immured, with the old inflictions of leg irons and half shaved heads. At three days' notice they were sent back to prison, many of them leaving their wives and children alone and unprotected in a vicious and disorderly penal settlement.

When they reëntered they were herded with the rest in the new political prison at or near the Kara Lower Diggings, a building somewhat better than those for common criminals, being larger, more spacious and better lighted, with four *kameras*, each warmed with a brick oven and provided with the conventional *nary* or sleeping platforms. At first the windows looked out upon the valley, an open if not very picturesque prospect. This was the case in other prisons for all criminal convicts, but it did not please Governor-General Anuchin, who ordered the whole place to be shut in by a high stockade. "A prison is not a palace," he cynically declared,

as he condemned his fellow creatures to be deprived of all view and restricted in the matter of light. Anuchin, in his report to the Czar, dated two years later, admits that the life of state criminals was "unbearable," but quite forgot how far he himself contributed to their sufferings.

Under the brutal system in force, insane companions, often raging lunatics, were confined with the rest. There were no asylums in Siberia, and the insane lived in association with the sane, adding much to the miseries of both. "In more than one place in the Trans-Baikal we were startled," says Kennan, "as we entered a crowded prison *kamera*, by some uncared-for lunatic, who sprang suddenly toward us with a wild cry or with a burst of hysterical laughter. . . . It is easier and cheaper to make the prison comrades of a lunatic take care of him than to keep him in seclusion and provide him with an attendant. For educated political prisoners, who dread insanity more than anything else, it is, of course, terribly depressing to have constantly before them, in the form of a wrecked intelligence, an illustration of the possible end of their own existence."

Several painful episodes soon followed the recommittal of the "free command" to prison. One was the suicide of Eugene Semyanovski, a young journalist connected with the underground journal *Onward*, who had gained his conditional freedom and lost it. He left a letter to his father bemoaning his hard fate, written the night before his reëntry to

prison, and shot himself in his bed. Another political hanged himself in the prison bath-house, and a third poisoned himself by drinking water in which he had soaked lucifer matches. Another most affecting incident was the mental failure of Madame Kovalevskaya, a brilliant woman, who had been actively concerned in the revolutionary propaganda as the only means of securing free institutions in the empire. She was sentenced to penal servitude at Kara, where she presently joined the "free command." Her husband was also exiled, but was sent to Minusinsk in Eastern Siberia, so that no less than a thousand miles intervened between the pair. Their only child had been left behind at Kiev in Russia. Madame Kovalevskaya's insanity declared itself after she went back to Kara prison and while Colonel Kanonovich was still in command, and she was then allowed to join her husband, but after partial recovery she was returned to Kara. Eventually, after the cowardly oppression of her comrades, she committed suicide.

Another consequence of the increased severity in the treatment of politicals was their widespread determination to break prison. Many escapes were attempted, and although they were for the most part frustrated, the feeling of unrest was so general that the authorities resolved to use more severe methods of coercion. A high official stated that they meant "to reduce the prison to order and give the politicals a lesson." Daily life was made more and more

irksome; privileges, great and small, were withdrawn; all books were removed; money, underclothing, beds and bedding were taken from them; they might possess nothing more than the bare necessities allowed to ordinary convicts. But worse than all, the whole number, kept hitherto in one prison, was broken up into small parties and distributed among the various common prisons of the Kara district, where they were to be treated under "dungeon conditions." This treatment meant more than the deprivation of small luxuries as above mentioned; it also entailed the loss of all exercise in the open air or communication with the outside, and a diet of only black rye bread and water, with sometimes a little broth thickened with barley.

The removal was made forcibly. Cossacks were concentrated at the Lower Diggings in anticipation of resistance, or perhaps to provoke it, and suddenly a descent was made upon the prison in the dead of night. A strong, armed force marched into the prison with bayonets fixed, and seized the poor politicals as they were roused from sleep. They were stripped, searched, driven forth with blows and otherwise cruelly maltreated. The next morning, having been robbed and despoiled of all their private possessions, they were marched off under escorts to the other Kara prisons. They marched continuously for ten miles without food or drink, or a halt for rest, and one man who was chained to a wheelbarrow rolled it all the way. Goaded to desperation,

those prisoners who were not ironed attacked the Cossacks with stones, but they were speedily overpowered. They arrived in a state of utter exhaustion at the common prisons, and were lodged two and two in "secret" cells, hitherto employed only for the safe custody of the worst criminals, which were bare rooms with no more furniture than the open *parasha*, or bucket, and with only the stone floor to sleep on.

These essentially "dungeon conditions" spent in the secret cells of the ordinary criminals were continued for two months, and at length the health of the politicals became grievously impaired. Foul air, insufficient food, close confinement and the lack of all exercise brought on an epidemic of scurvy, which resulted in serious illnesses in many cases. They were still without underclothing, bedding or nourishing food, although the authorities held prisoners' moneys out of which the cost might have been defrayed. All the politicals were then transferred to the Lower Diggings, and lodged in the new cells of the state prison. Seven or eight prisoners were crowded into a narrow space obtained by dividing each *kamera* into three parts by the creation of partitions. The sleeping platform nearly filled each interior and left little standing room, and the pollution of the air was "simply maddening." Protest and remonstrance were continuous, and only ceased when threats of flogging were made, a form of punishment never yet inflicted on politicals.

At length the unhappy victims of such savage repression had recourse to a "hunger strike," the last terrible weapon of the otherwise helpless prisoners. It is a strange and almost incomprehensible fact that the Russian prison authorities have always yielded to the pressure exercised by a number of prisoners resolutely determined to starve themselves to death. Our deepest sympathy must be accorded to the great courage that inspires this last appeal against intolerable cruelties. We admire and understand it, but are amazed that it should be so effectual with the brutal and otherwise insensible oppressors. When the much wronged politicals delivered their ultimatum, the authorities at first received it with indifference, but soon became anxious and at length despairing, as the refusal to take food was steadfastly persisted in. Not a morsel of sustenance was taken. "As day after day passed, the stillness of death gradually settled down upon the prison. The starving convicts, too weak and apathetic even to talk to one another, lay in rows, like dead men, upon the plank sleeping platforms, and the only sounds heard in the building were the footsteps of the sentries, and now and then the incoherent mutterings of the insane."

Overtures were made and amelioration in their condition was promised; fears of flogging were ridiculous, the officials said, and nothing of the kind had been contemplated. But the strike continued, for the strikers had no confidence in the plausible

assurances of the governor. On the tenth day of starvation, the state of affairs was desperate. The indomitable sufferers had reached the last stage of physical exhaustion, and release by death seemed close at hand. The struggle was anxiously watched from St. Petersburg. Telegrams passed daily between the local authorities and the minister of the interior, who could only suggest medical intervention, which does not seem to have been tried beyond feeling pulses and taking the bodily temperatures. The wives of the strikers were finally granted the unusual privilege of an interview, on condition that they would implore their husbands to take food. These loving entreaties, backed by fresh promises from the commandant, finally overcame the resolution of the politicals, and on the thirteenth day of abstention the great hunger strike ended.

The physical endurance called forth by a hunger strike has been well described by Leo Deutsch, who was driven to refuse food by his ill-usage in the Odessa prison in the early stages of his sentence. His well-known character for sturdy defiance had so disturbed the prison authorities that they had taken extraordinary precautions to secure him, by lodging him in a dark underground cell, with no bedding except straw infested with rats, and no ventilation. He decided to starve himself in protest. They threatened to feed him artificially; he retorted that he knew how to bring on sickness. Then they listened to his very justifiable protest, and on the

fourth day he ended his strike. He says, "It was only when I began to eat that I realised how fearfully hungry I was. I could have devoured an ox. . . . During the two following days I felt very seedy, as though I had had a bad illness."

Hunger strikes were more especially the weapon of the weaker sex, although there was no weakness among the women revolutionists, and the movement owed much of its vigour and vitality to their indomitable courage and unconquerable strength of character. In the days to come, when the great, patient people of a cruelly oppressed and misgoverned land have achieved its emancipation, ample justice must be done to the feminine champions, who entered boldly into the fray and fought strenuously for the vindication of the rights of their fellow countrymen to freedom and independence. Many of their names will then be honoured and revered with the greatest of those known to history. Russian women of all stations, and some of them of the highest rank, have won the admiration of the whole world, for their disregard of self, the sacrifice of all ease and comfort, and the braving of the worst dangers and the most poignant sufferings in their constant efforts to oppose political slavery. We may be inclined to quarrel with their methods, overlooking the greatness of their provocation, and believing that nothing could justify the violent means adopted, but we cannot withhold our sympathy for the ardent souls who have dared employ them.

Some of the most remarkable female revolutionists were concerned with the hunger strikes in Eastern Siberia and were victims of the methods inflicted in retaliation of outraged discipline. There were those who emulated the crime of Vera Zassulich, who in 1878 tried, but failed, to shoot General Trepov, the chief of the St. Petersburg police, for ordering the corporal punishment of a political prisoner. Madame Kutitonskaya fired at General Ilyashevich, the governor of the Trans-Baikal, to avenge the intolerable ill-usage of the political prisoners on the 11th of May, 1882. Madame Hope Sigida struck Colonel Masyukov in the face, to shame him into withdrawing from Kara, where he was commandant of the political prisons, and where his indignant female charges had boycotted him, insisting upon his removal. Madame Elizabeth Kovalskaya deliberately showed her contempt for the governor-general of the Amur, Baron Korv, by refusing to rise in his presence, and was in consequence removed to the central prison in Verkhni-Udinsk.

The lives and antecedents of some of these female exiles who suffered so bitterly for their opinions, merit special notice. Maria Kutitonskaya was a pupil in a girls' school at Odessa and joined the revolutionists while still a young girl. She was arrested with Lisogub, a wealthy man who lived in extreme poverty in order to devote his fortune to the revolutionary funds, and she was condemned to four years'

hard labour. Madame Kutitonskaya was the uncompromising foe of the prison officials and constantly resisted the irksome rules imposed. With three other women, Mesdames Kovalevskaya, Bogolometz and Elena Rossikova, she was removed to Irkutsk and there got into contest with the chief of the police, against whom they organised a hunger strike in which they persisted for ten or eleven days, until the prison doctor grew alarmed and representation was made to the governor of the district who brought the police officer to reason.

Madame Kutitonskaya was a lady of great personal attractions, with fair face and winning manner, and was greatly admired. After her attempt to assassinate General Ilyashevich, she was closely confined on bread and water in a damp, gloomy dungeon. The ordinary convicts brought her food, fell at her feet and christened her "Cupidon Skaya," as a pet name in recognition of her beauty. The story of her murderous attack is told in full by Kennan.

"Stirred to the very depths of her soul by a feeling of intense indignation" at the shameful ill-treatment of the politicals at Kara, she did not hesitate to sacrifice her life and that of her unborn child by committing a deed that must give publicity to the wrongs she and her companions had suffered. When interned in the town of Aksha in the Trans-Baikal district, she purchased a small revolver from a released criminal colonist, ran away from her place

of banishment and made for Chita, where the governor resided. She was too pretty to travel alone without attracting attention and when she reached Chita she was arrested. At the police station she did not deny her identity but pleaded that she was eager to have an interview with the governor. Accordingly, she was detained in the reception room while a message was sent to Ilyashevich which brought the general to her. They had neglected to search her, and she held her revolver ready cocked under a handkerchief as the governor entered, shooting him forthwith through the lungs. The wound was not mortal, and the assailant was promptly seized and carried off to the Chita prison.

Her subsequent treatment was abominable. She was lodged in a "secret" cell, cold, dark, dirty, too short to allow her to lie down at full length, and too low to permit her to stand upright. Her own dress and underclothing were taken from her, contrary to the usual treatment of women politicals, and a ragged petticoat infested with vermin was given her in exchange. Despite her condition, she was obliged to lie for three months without bedclothing on the bare floor. Serious illness seized her, and she begged at least for a little straw to sleep on; it was contemptuously denied her. But for the succour brought by her criminal comrades, she could not have survived until her trial. This at last took place before a court-martial, and she was sentenced to be hanged. Had she made known her

pregnancy, it might have gained her a reprieve, but she forbore to speak, although she suffered bitterly at the prospect of becoming the murderess of her unborn child. The feeling was intensified by the dreadful thought that it might remain alive after she had died. The question was solved by the unexpected leniency of the government, by whom the death penalty was commuted to penal servitude for life at the creditable intercession of her intended victim. She was then removed in mid-winter to Irkutsk, and would have been entirely unprovided with warm clothing but for the charity of her criminal comrades, who gave her felt boots and a sheepskin overcoat. The immediate result of her treatment was the birth of a still-born child, and she herself succumbed eventually to lung trouble.

Madame Kovalevskaya is described by Deutsch, who knew her well, as one of the most notable women in the revolutionary movement. She was the daughter of a landed proprietor named Vorontsov, her brother was Basil Vorontsov, a well known political economist, and she married Kovalevskaya, a tutor in a gymnasium of Kiev. She had thrown in her lot with the advanced party in the early sixties, and she devoted herself constantly to the work. In appearance she was short in stature, gipsy-like in appearance, alert and energetic in manner, keen witted, ready and logical in speech. She took the lead in theoretical discussions, imparting life and spirit into debate without becoming personal or

hurting people's feelings. Her gifts were exceptional; she was a brilliant creature born to play a distinguished part in society. At an early age she had opened a peasant school and sought to improve the mental condition of the poorer classes. Her efforts soon drew upon her the attention of the police, and she was harried and thwarted by them until they drove her into the ranks of the revolutionary party. The circle in Kiev to which she belonged was broken up, its members were arrested and she and her husband were exiled to Siberia. Her fiery and uncompromising temper kept her in constant antagonism with the authorities, and her active protest against the ill-treatment of her comrade politicals brought her prominently to the front, with the fatal consequences already described.

Of her three friends, one, Madame Kutitonskaya, has been mentioned; a second was Sophia Bogomol'tz, whose maiden name was Prisyetskaya, and who was the daughter of a rich landowner of Poltava. She had graduated at a medical school in St. Petersburg and, having married a doctor, threw herself ardently into revolutionary work. She was arrested as a member of the South Russian Workmen's Union and was sent to ten years' hard labour in Siberia with a companion, Madame Kovalskaya. They escaped from the Irkutsk prison but were recaptured in a few weeks, before they could leave the city. When brought back, the customary search was personally supervised by Colonel So-

liviov, an adjutant of the governor-general and a man of vicious character, and by his order the two women were stripped naked before him. After this disgrace to humanity and the uniform he wore, he went immediately to one of the men's wards and boasted of the shameful deed, adding contemptuously, "Your political women are not much to look at." Whereupon one of those present, Shchedrin, who had been a school-teacher before sentence, struck the brute upon the mouth, calling him coward and liar. For this violent protest Shchedrin was condemned to be chained perpetually to a wheelbarrow as already described.

Madame Bogomoletz was punished with an additional five years' penal sentence, to be passed as a "probationer" prisoner, serving the full term without the remission granted to others, and with no prospect of the "time of alleviation" or that of conditional release. She was quite indomitable, and looked upon all prison officials as her natural enemies to whom she would make no compromise and yield no obedience. Nothing deterred her, no fear of punishment, threats, or infliction of the most irksome conditions, and the whole staff trembled before her.

Elena Rossikova had been sentenced to a life term for a daring robbery from the finance department at Kherson. She was the wife of a country gentleman who had been a school-teacher at Elizabetgrad, and with a confederate she had suc-

ceeded in seizing a large sum of public money, meaning to devote it to revolutionary purposes. Her accomplice was Anna Alexieova, afterward Madame Dubrova, a convict and a professional burglar who had escaped from Siberia. They had entered the government treasury through a tunnel driven under the stone floor in the vault of a house adjoining, a wild and desperate scheme for two young and inexperienced girls. That they planned and dared effect it bears witness to the determined character of the Russian women revolutionists. Kennan says the thieves were caught before they could remove all the stolen money, but, according to Leo Deutsch, they succeeded in their attempt. The next day, however, a woman was intercepted as she drove a cart laden with sacks through the town, and the sacks were found to be stuffed full of ruble notes, to the number of a million. Arrest followed, including that of the convict, who at once confessed her share in the transaction and gave such information as led to the recovery of the greater part of the stolen money.

Madame Rossikova, as the elder woman and originator of the plan, was condemned by court-martial, before which she was arraigned, to hard labour for a long term at the mines; Anna Alexieova was sentenced merely to exile as a forced colonist and she married Dubrova, a missionary at Krasnoyarsk. The two girls began as philanthropists, eager to benefit and improve the peasant class, but developed under the persecution of the authorities and their

unjust, overbearing treatment into pronounced revolutionists. Both were large-minded women, capable of the greatest self-sacrifice and acting in accordance with a high moral standard. Madame Rossikova had given proof of her sincerity by accepting the ordeal known as "going to the people"; in other words, she lived for seven or eight months like a common peasant woman, in a peasant village, that she might see how best to reach and help the people. She had long disapproved of terrorism, but became a pronounced terrorist herself, moved to the fiercest indignation by the reports that reached her of the sufferings of her exiled friends.

Perhaps one of the most celebrated of the female revolutionists was Madame Vera Phillipova, born Figner, who never found her way to the mines of Kara, where she would undoubtedly have become prominent among the most active champions of her party. She was long the most popular personage in the revolutionary movement; her name was in everybody's mouth, her fine traits, her unfailing and unlimited constancy, her undefeated, self-sacrificing devotion to the cause, her talents for organisation, her boundless inventive powers, her tireless energy, — all won for her profound respect from her comrades; and even her enemies, the members of the court-martial which condemned her, were forced to admire her dignified demeanour when arraigned and tried for her life. A mere girl, of striking beauty, and possessing extraordinary personal influence,

she freely spent herself in the service of her fellows. Like many other well-born girls, her chief aim was to help the peasants, and she devoted herself to the rough life in small villages on the Volga, enduring all the hardships and privations of the labouring classes, and her self sacrifice was greatly stimulated by what she saw of misery, poverty and hopeless ignorance.

It was borne in on her that reform could only be effected by the most reckless measures, and she became a terrorist heart and soul, vowed to violence, and prepared to go to any extreme. In this temper, she readily joined in the plot for the assassination of the Czar, Alexander II, on his return from Livadia to St. Petersburg, and the dynamite for use in the bombs was stored in her house. This did not absorb all her energies, and she was still active in the organisation of secret societies and in preaching revolutionary principles among people of good society, to which she belonged by birth and education; for she was the daughter of a distinguished general and was well received by the best people.

At Odessa she mixed much with the military set and thus became identified with the conspiracy of "the Fourteen." Nearly all of those concerned were military or naval officers, five of whom, with Vera Figner and Ludmilla Volkenstein, were condemned to death. She knew that she and her companions had been betrayed, and she might have es-

Russian Prisoners

From the shipwreck of the "Albatross"

The Russian ship "Albatross" was wrecked on the coast of Alaska about four miles from the mouth of the Yukon River. The ship was carrying a large number of Russian prisoners of war, who were taken from the Japanese during the Russo-Japanese War. The prisoners were taken to the ship by the Japanese, and they were kept there until the ship was wrecked. The prisoners were then taken to the shore, and they were kept there until they were released.



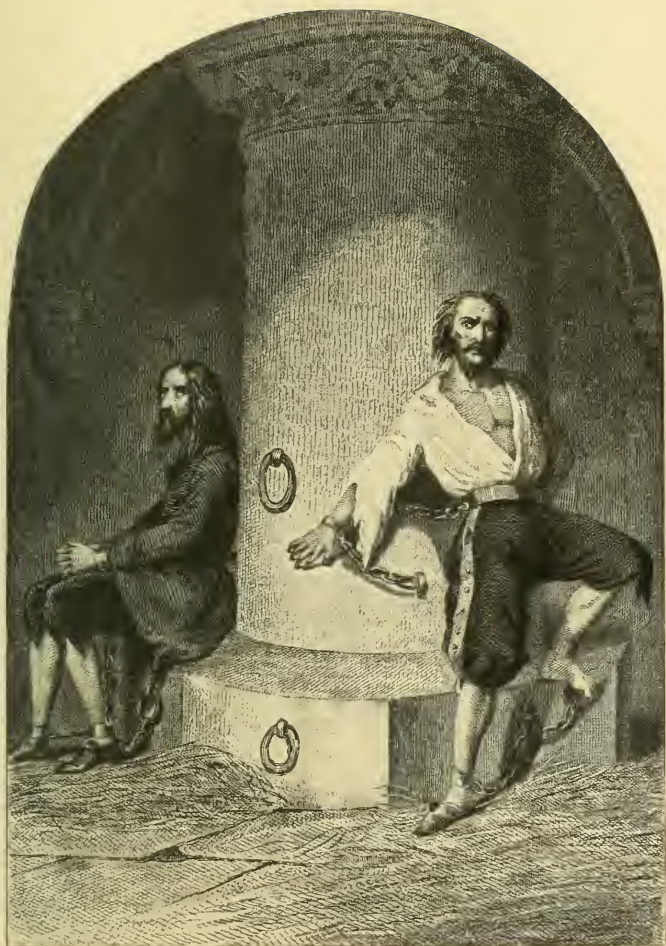
she freed herself in the darkness of the night. Like some inner well-born girl, she was not only before the peasant, and she drew from the peasant life in small villages on the Volga, something of the hardship and privation of the Russian soldier, and her self-training was greatly assisted by what she saw of misery, poverty, and human ignorance.

It was borne in on her that reform could only be effected by the most radical measures, and she became a terror to her family and friends, a patient, and prey. *After the painting by March*

The Fortress of Schlüsselburg is situated on an island in Lake Ladoga, about forty miles from St. Petersburg. The worst of all fates meted out to political prisoners in Russia is imprisonment in the subterranean dungeons of this fortress. No news penetrates the walls of the isolated prison and no information from within leaks out. Few ever leave the prison alive except to be transferred to an insane asylum.

It is the most terrible of all punishments, and to surviving revolutionaries prisoners among people of good courage, it is often the punishment by death and immolation. But she was the daughter of a distinguished general and was well known by the best of the army.

Of course she would much with the military set and she would identified with the conspiracy of the "Prisoners." Nearly all of those concerned in the conspiracy or royal officers, five of whom, with Prince Kropotkin and Dmitriy Volkovskiy, were sentenced to death. She knew that she and her companions had been betrayed, and she might have



caped by timely flight into another country, but she scorned to yield, although arrest was certain, and she held her ground, only to be convicted and thrown into the Schlüsselburg, condemned to imprisonment for the term of her natural life.

While in the Schlüsselburg, Vera Figner studied Italian and English, and translated many of Kipling's works into Russian. After she had spent altogether twenty years in prison, she committed the offence of striking an officer. Her mother, who had promised not to intercede for her, could no longer keep silent; and appealed to the Czar, with the result that the life sentence passed upon the famous revolutionist was reduced to one of twenty years. Instead of releasing her immediately, however, Plehve kept her two more years in the Schlüsselburg, saying, "There is still too much life left in her." To her unspeakable grief, her mother died a few weeks before she was released in 1904.

She was exiled to a tiny village close to the arctic regions, and a year and a half afterward she was allowed to return to her estate in the Kazan province. She has since made a trip to Italy for her health, and although her nervous system received such a shock that she has never fully recovered, she has renewed activity for the cause to which she has devoted her life by lecturing in foreign cities.

Another woman revolutionist who afterward suffered greatly at Kara was Madame Anna Pavlovna Korba, the daughter of a German nobleman natural-

ised in Russia, named Meinhardt. She had married a Swiss gentleman living in Russia. She was the friend of Madame Löschern von Herzfeld, who had been one of those banished, but afterward pardoned, in "the case of the 193." She was again arrested at Kiev with arms in her hand, and suffered a second exile with a long imprisonment at Kara. On her return from the campaign of 1878-9 in Turkey, where she had worked as a nurse, she adopted the revolutionary programme. The "white terror" was at its height; the government was active in pursuing the politicals who were pledged to destroy the Czar; and in 1882, Soudyehkin, the chief of the secret police, laid a heavy hand on them, arresting them in batches, executing many and burying the rest alive in St. Petersburg dungeons. Anna Korba, undaunted, threw herself into the fight, and strove earnestly to replace those who had fallen in the ranks. She was arrested for being concerned in the manufacture of dynamite bombs at a secret laboratory, and her trial ended in exile at Kara with twenty years at hard labour, which nearly killed her.

Madame Elizabeth Kovalskaya, whose fruitless effort to escape from Irkutsk has been described, deliberately planned to offend a great official in order to secure her removal. One day, when Baron Korv, the governor-general, visited the prison, she failed purposely to rise from her seat in his presence. Baron Korv objected harshly to this mark of disrespect to a man in his position, and Madame Ko-

valskaya quietly replied that she had not elected him to it. The enraged official left the prison saying he would send instructions how to deal with this refractory female, and shortly afterward an order came to remove her to the central prison at Verkhni Udinsk, as her unruly behaviour had a demoralising effect at Kara.

The new removal would have been in accordance with Madame Kovalskaya's wishes, but it was most savagely carried out. The blame lay with the commandant of the Kara political prison. Colonel Masyukov, an officer of the gendarmerie, had held this post for about ten years. He was a man of weak character, of low mental calibre, without judgment and quite unfitted for the functions he discharged. Once an officer of the guards, he had wasted his substance in riotous living and had accepted this well paid post to discharge his liabilities and his gambling debts.

Colonel Masyukov stupidly supposed that the female prisoners stirred up by Madame Kovalskaya would have risen to resist her transfer. He resolved, therefore, that she should be conveyed away secretly without a word of notice. A subordinate officer, named Bobrovski, accompanied by a party of gendarmes and ordinary convicts, burst into her cell at four o'clock in the morning and dragged her out of bed, half naked, with no more covering than her nightdress. She was hurried to the office and here ordered to put on the coarse garments of a

common criminal. After this she fainted, and, wrapped up unconscious in a blanket, was carried out to the bank of the river Shilka, where an open boat was in readiness to carry her to Stretensk, the steamboat navigation not being yet practicable. In this small boat she travelled seventy miles for three days and nights with the soldiers of her escort who had already treated her with shameful indignity.

This forcible seizure had aroused the whole prison, and the other women, maddened by the victim's shrieks and believing that her honour was being outraged, became perfectly infuriated. They declared a hunger strike forthwith and refused food unless Masyukov was dismissed from his post. The commandant now deeply regretted his foolish action, and took counsel a little too late from his more sensible subordinates, especially one wise old sergeant, Golubtsov, a tactful man of long experience and much common sense. On his advice the male prisoners were called in to pacify their incensed women comrades and persuade them to abandon their strike. They suggested that the commandant should be requested to apologise to his offended charges, a satisfaction altogether scouted as insufficient by the strikers. The famishing women still insisted upon the withdrawal of Masyukov. The condition seemed impossible of concession by the authorities, but it was hoped that the commandant might himself solve the difficulty by applying for a transfer elsewhere. This settled the question for the

moment, and the women consented to take food on the clear understanding that if Masyukov had not disappeared within a certain period, the hunger strike would be recommenced.

This in effect came to pass. The commandant held his ground. The malcontents again refused food, and now the men, although they thought the suggested apology would have been sufficient atonement by Masyukov, joined in the protest and also went out "on strike." The commandant thereupon came to terms; he produced a telegram accepting his resignation; and once more food was eaten, after a week's starvation. But the women would not forgive Masyukov and declined to hold any communication with him. He was "boycotted" completely to the extent even of a refusal on their part to receive their letters from home after passing through his hands. This high spirited resolve reacted very painfully upon themselves. Mental torture worse than the physical was superadded to their sufferings, and they were all but driven to despair. No letters were sent and all which were received were returned unopened through the post to their senders.

This absolute severance of home ties bore especially hard upon one of the latest arrivals in the prison, — Madame Hope Sigida, "a sensitive young creature, gentle, affectionate and attracted by all that was good and beautiful. She was deeply attached to her family, who lived in Taganrock, a small town

in South Russia." She had been a school teacher, and was condemned to eight years' hard labour because a printing press and some bombs had been discovered in the house where she resided with her husband who was an officer in Taganrock circuit court. The latter was condemned to death, but the sentence was commuted to deportation to Saghalien, and he died on his way to that island. Madame Sigida, in her bereavement, felt acutely the cessation of all relations with her distant home, and when her comrades, goaded to desperation, were upon the point of resuming the hunger strike, she determined to sacrifice herself for the common good. Hoping that relief might in that way come to the rest, she planned to attack Masyukov alone. She sought an interview with the commandant, and it was granted in due course. A most dramatic incident followed, as told by eye-witnesses. She was driven to the office in a carriage under escort, and was taken in to speak to Colonel Masyukov, who the next moment was seen to jump out of the window, evidently much excited and terrified, and take to his heels. Then Madame Sigida came to the door, and after caressing some warder's children who stood there, in a quiet, unperturbed voice begged that a telegraphic message might be despatched to the proper authorities informing them that she had assaulted the commandant by striking him in the face. She justified her violence as the only means of shaming him into taking his departure. At least she suc-

ceeded in forcing him to show himself in his character of a mean, despicable coward.

Madame Sigida was forthwith cast into a secret cell and subjected to "dungeon conditions," while awaiting trial for her grave breach of discipline. Her self-sacrifice had not availed to avert the hunger strike. It began immediately afterward by all the women prisoners, and was persisted in for sixteen days with the same argument, that Colonel Masyukov, now ridiculed and disgraced, must go.

Madame Sigida, still waiting judgment, refused food and remained fasting for twenty-two days, until medical intervention was decreed. Madame Kovalskaya struck the doctor in the face when she thought he was about to forcibly administer nourishment. But he was a humane man and disclaimed all such intention, and she begged his pardon.

For some time no formal inquiry into Madame Sigida's assault was made, and no steps were taken to deal with her case. But after the lapse of a month or more, when the matter had been reported to St. Petersburg, a reply came directed against the whole body of the politicals. Colonel Masyukov, still holding his ground, assembled them and, escorted by soldiers, behind whom he sought protection, read aloud a letter from the governor-general in which he warned the politicals that they were in future amenable to corporal punishment. The penalty was deemed necessary by the authorities for the

maintenance of discipline in the disturbed state of the prison.

Consternation fell upon these long suffering victims of a despotic government, who although defenders of their undoubted rights, as admitted in all civilised countries, had never rendered themselves liable to such reprisals. The penalty was, moreover, illegal in their case, and the threat to flog was considered an undeserved and outrageous insult. The desire to raise indignant protest possessed all, and many would have gone so far as to counsel a general suicide. The leader of this extreme view was Sergius Bobohov, a man of the loftiest sentiments, who had adopted revolutionary principles from a strict sense of their justice and necessity. Deutsch's estimate of his character is worth quoting at length. "Genuine sincerity, seriousness of purpose, and boundless devotion to his ideal were his leading traits. He was the most modest of men, but when the honour of a revolutionist was at stake, or if it were a question of duty, he would undergo a transformation and become a fiery and inspired prophet." Bobohov took the threat of flogging very much to heart, and passionately urged that an answering threat of suicide should be addressed to the minister of the interior. "I cling to life as much as any man," he said, "but I am ready to face death as a means of protest." His arguments had weight with his comrades, but might not have prevailed except for the disastrous course of events.

At this moment a catastrophe was precipitated by the almost incredible news that Madame Sigida, the assailant of Colonel Masyukov, was to be flogged by order of Baron Korv, the governor-general and persecutor of Madame Kovalskaya. The punishment was to be inflicted with rods in the presence of the prison doctor, but without previous medical certificate. The surgeon of the Kara penal settlement had given it as his opinion that the poor creature was unfit to receive even a single blow, and declined to be present, as the infliction was by administrative order and without a sentence of court. The governor hesitated to inflict the punishment, but Baron Korv persisted in the flogging, surgeon or no surgeon. The executioner was the same subordinate official, Bobrovski, who had distinguished himself in the misuse of Madame Kovalskaya. He had received promotion for his brutal conduct on that occasion, and was willing to curry favour further with his merciless superiors.

Details of this horrible tragedy are wanting as the lips of those who assisted are sealed. The authorities have, indeed, dared to deny the facts through their mouthpieces in the press, but they were well known throughout Siberia and their truth has been acknowledged by high officials who strove to justify the infliction. Ill-considered attempts have been made by at least imperfectly informed champions to discredit the whole story, which stands nevertheless as an indelible disgrace to Rus-

sian penal administrators, whose only excuse was that the nihilist women "had brought troubles upon themselves by being excitable and intractable, and an example was necessary."

So the example was made. Madame Sigida was stripped and beaten with rods, when in a state of unconsciousness, for she soon fainted under the infliction, and was carried back senseless from the place of punishment to her cell. Two days later she died, but whether from the effects of the flogging or from deliberate poisoning is not positively known. Three of her female companions undoubtedly committed suicide, and on the men's side seventeen out of thirty-nine resolved to put an end to their own lives. The result was not altogether successful. The drug, opium, was either old or adulterated, and many who lay down to die only woke to excruciating agony and were saved in spite of themselves. A few of them, Bobohov among the number, tried again, choosing morphia as the means of self-destruction, but once more the drug was ineffective and only two actually died.

The fate of those in durance is largely dependent upon the character and quality of those who have them in charge. Nowhere does this fact stand out more prominently than in Russian prisons. The governor, director or commandant is a petty despot; within his own narrow limits he is almost irresponsible, though subject, of course, to the control of superiors, but this has never been very closely exer-

cised. Inspections are for the most part perfunctory, and abuses, especially that of power, may flourish freely without detection or interference. This ramifies through all the grades, and the prisoner, of whatever class, is very much at the mercy of the subordinate officials with whom he is brought into daily personal contact. The ordinary warder is very much the same everywhere: a man placed in authority over others often superior to himself in antecedents, birth, education and experience of life. He is apt to become arbitrary, tyrannical and self-sufficient from the authority he wields, whether delegated or usurped. After all he is only an agent, a deputy and go-between, carrying out the orders of his masters, whose moods he reflects, whose attitude he imitates, and whose temper animates him, inspiring him to harass and oppress or, more rarely, to be merciful and forbearing. Warders almost invariably take their tone from their supreme chief; hence the deep importance that attaches to the governor in prison life.

There were good and bad rulers in Russian prisons, the latter perhaps predominating, although occasionally a humane, well-intentioned and considerate man was to be met with, such as Kanonovich, who for a time governed the Kara political prison kindly and leniently, as has already been described. After him came a succession of gendarmerie officers from Irkutsk whose characters are summed up by Kennan as follows:—“Khalturin

was brutally cruel, Shubin was a man of little character, and Manaiev was not only a drunkard, but a thief who destroyed hundreds of the prisoners' letters and embezzled 1,900 rubles of money sent to them by their relatives and friends in European Russia." Then came Captain Nikolin, of whom more directly. All these were men of much the same stamp as the "Major" of the Omsk *ostrog* described by Dostoyevski. He was, he says, "a fatal being for prisoners, whom he had brought to such a state that they trembled before him. Severe to the point of insanity, 'he threw himself upon them,' to use their expression. But it was above all that look, as penetrating as that of a lynx, that was feared. It was impossible to conceal anything from him. He saw, so to say, without looking. On entering the prison, he knew at once what was being done. Accordingly the convicts, one and all, called him the man with the eight eyes. His system was bad, for it had the effect of irritating men who were already irascible." Fortunately for the prisoners, he was under a superior, for, as the writer tells us, "the commandant was a well-bred, reasonable man who moderated the savage onslaughts of the major, or the latter would have caused sad misfortune by his bad administration."

This major was universally loathed by the prisoners, and more than once was on the verge of murderous attack. There were times when the convicts at Omsk were goaded to desperation by his brutal-

ity. One day a dozen men from Little Russia swore to take his life, and their leader had borrowed the kitchen knife and secreted it about his person. The grievance for the moment was the badness of the food, and when the major came in to expostulate, the assailant rushed at him, but found that his victim was drunk, or, according to prison superstition, "under special protection." It was more than he deserved, for he was a blasphemous and overbearing wretch. After having carried the knapsack for many long years, promotion to the grade of officer had turned his head.

Captain Nikolin was an officer of gendarmes who had been specially selected at St. Petersburg and sent out to govern the state prisons at Kara. Kennan speaks of him as "an old and experienced gendarme officer of the most subtle and unscrupulous type, who had received his training under General Muraviov, 'the hangman, in Poland,' and had been about thirty years in the service. . . . He had the suavity and courteous manners of the accomplished gendarme officer, . . . and he greeted me with what he intended for frank, open cordiality, softening, so far as possible, all the hard lines of his face; but he could not bring a spark of good fellowship into his cold, watchful gray eyes, and I felt conscious that all his real mental processes were carefully masked." He was very proud of his position: that he, a simple captain of gendarmes, had been sent to this important command, where he was

independent of local control and entitled to correspond direct with the minister of the interior. His whole object was to hoodwink Kennan, whom he assured blandly and mendaciously that the prisoners led a life of ease, even of luxury, sitting in a *kamera* like a club smoking room, reading and writing and pleasantly conversing. He further asserted that the "politicals" received considerable sums from their friends in Russia; that they bought what books they pleased, had newspapers, including the London *Punch* and other illustrated papers, and in a word, were "treated with gracious clemency by an enlightened and paternal government." Nikolin showed the cloven foot later when he urged his colleague to seize Mr. Kennan's baggage and search it, by which high-handed proceeding, happily avoided, much of the incriminating material so daringly secured by the fearless American, would have been lost to the indignant readers of the civilised world.

We have another portrait of Captain Nikolin from one who knew him but too well. Leo Deutsch suffered for some years under his régime and describes him "as a malicious, ill-natured man, continually devising petty humiliations for the prisoners." In person he was a short, heavily built man, some fifty years of age, "with a bald head, a full gray beard, thin, tightly closed, rather cruel lips, an impenetrable face and cold gray eyes. His broad round face, cunning little eyes, and bristling mous-

tache, gave him the look of a fat, spiteful old tom-cat, and he was always designated by that nickname. The expression of his eyes was particularly catlike; he looked as if just ready to pounce on a victim and stick his claws into it. He always spoke in a low voice, this 'tom-cat;' but he chattered unceasingly, and kept smacking his lips all the time, his expression being always peevish and discontented. . . . We petitioned our 'tom-cat' for leave to plant a garden in the yard; there was space enough, the work would have been beneficial, and then we might have had vegetables for our table, the deficiency in which particular had been so detrimental to our health. The 'tom-cat' roundly refused. 'We should need spades,' he said, 'and they might be used to dig a hole whereby to get away.' So, again, when one of us was sent some flower-seeds and sowed them in a wooden box, the box was taken away by Nikolin's orders; the earth in it might have served to conceal some contraband article. Such needless tyrannies embittered us still more against the detested commandant. However peaceably we might otherwise have been inclined, our hatred of this man might well have blazed out at any opportunity; he himself probably guessed as much, for he became more and more mistrustful, at last never entering our prison. He felt that he had made enemies all round him, and sat lonely in his own house, or squabbled with his cook, afraid to show himself outside. It may be a matter of sur-

prise that one of his many enemies did not find a way to put an end to him, that being a not unusual course of events in Kara; but finally he could endure such a life no longer, and applied to be transferred elsewhere. In the spring of 1887 his application was granted, and he departed, accompanied by the anathemas of the entire population of Kara." Captain Nikolin was in due course succeeded by the Colonel Masyukov of whom we have heard so much in his conflict with the politicals of the state prison at Kara.

Captain Nikolin's colleague at Kara, coequal in authority, but with independent functions, was Major Potulov, who governed the ordinary criminal prison at Kara. He was a man of a pleasanter type, who was both civil and hospitable to George Kennan, possibly to keep an eye upon his motions and, perhaps, take the sting out of the condemnation his command so richly deserved. He is described as a tall, fine looking, soldierly man about fifty years of age, affable in manner and disposed to act fairly by his charges, so far as it lay within his power. Where he failed was in loyalty to his superiors, and he was gifted with rare talents for fraud and embezzlement. He stole unblushingly, and enriched himself largely at the expense of the state. His chief device was to keep hundreds of prisoners on the rolls who were mere "ghosts;" men who had disappeared by flight or death, but for whom rations were still drawn and the value thereof shared

between him and the purveyor. He was presently detected and dismissed, but escaped justice through his influential friends.

Patrin of Saghalién came to the front at a later date, when deportation to the island colony was in full swing, and his evil reputation became widespread as the most brutal and rapacious official in Russian penal annals. His character was so well known far and wide that he figured as the prison demon on the San Francisco stage. His was a reign of terror in the Alexandrovsk prison, and he drove through the town armed with revolver and Winchester rifle, committing acts of atrocious criminal violence in the open streets. Horrible stories were current of his misuse of his charges, of constant punishments in the dark cells or with the plet till death was the result. He was equally harsh with his officers. One of them, who had gone to complain of the insulting and outrageous conduct of a comrade toward his (the complainant's) wife, was struck on the mouth by Patrin and felled to the ground. He had an abrupt way of dealing with recalcitrant prisoners. One day there came before him a young convict of an irascible temper, who had obstinately refused to work. Patrin forthwith fell upon him, striking him on the jaw. The prisoner, although of slight build, closed with the governor and, showing superhuman strength, dragged him to the top of the staircase. Now the warders who had been hanging about hurried to their chief's assist-

ance, and the fight became a perfect *mêlée* in one confused struggling group, all gravitating toward the edge of the stairs, down which they suddenly fell headlong. Patrin came out on top, with the prisoner underneath. But the latter had seized a revolver from one of the guards, and when he was raised to his feet pointed the weapon to his own forehead and shot himself, saying, "It was Patrin I wanted to kill."

The political prisoners at Saghalien were subjected to the tender mercies of Patrin, and he also had charge of the women's prison, but his infamous behaviour toward the women was too abominable to be told.

CHAPTER IX

CHANGES IN SYSTEM

The Kara settlements — Descriptions of the prisons by Kennan — Filthy state of the prison buildings at Ust Kara — Gold mining — Illicit trade in "stolen gold" — Improvements in the prison system — The new prison of Alexandrovsk — Mr. Foster Fraser's account of the excellent state of the prison in 1901 — The prison at Verkhni Udinsk — The island of Saghalien used as a penal colony — Disadvantages of the place — Coal mining chief industry — Climate uncongenial — Exiles sent by sea from Odessa — Terrible sufferings on the voyage — Convict marriages — Deplorable conditions on the island — Prison discipline in force at Alexandrovsk — Punishments inflicted — The plot.

OF the partial attempts made by Russia to reform the methods of inflicting penal servitude on wrongdoers, I shall speak more at large. A detailed account must be given of the new prisons erected more in conformity with modern ideas; and the persistent pursuit of that will-o'-the-wisp, penal colonisation by deportation to the desert island of Saghalien, with its futile processes and disappointing results, claims attention. Before leaving the older methods of enforcing hard labour, it will be well to describe its last stronghold and the system obtaining there until quite a recent date. "Kara the Black," so called from a Tartar word, aptly de-

scribes the series of prisons and convict settlements established in the valley of the Kara River to work the mines, chiefly gold mines, the private property of the Czar. There are other mines of salt and silver, the latter chiefly at Nertchinsk, supposed to have been worked out, and now leased to private hands with profitable return, in spite of their deadly unhealthiness from the quicksilver emanations that poisoned them. The annals of Nertchinsk are as horrible as any in Siberian prison history, and the ancient prison of Akatui in the district still stands to bear witness to the cruelties and tragedies practised upon the unhappy politicals who inhabited it. The silver mines were reopened at Algachi in the neighbourhood, where there was a prison which Kennan saw and unhesitatingly condemned. "As a place of confinement," he writes, "even for the worst class of offenders, it was a disgrace to a civilised state, and the negligence, indifference and incompetence shown by the government in dealing with its admitted evils were absolutely inexcusable." Speaking further of the Nertchinsk district and of the mines at Algachi and Pokrovski and others, Mr. Kennan was of opinion that the prisoners permitted to work in them suffered less than those, the larger proportion, who were doomed to unbroken idleness in the overcrowded, foul-smelling prisons. It was irksome enough to work eight or ten hours daily in an icy gallery, three hundred feet below ground; the mines were badly ventilated, and the gases liber-

ated by the explosives used may be injurious; but there are no deadly exhalations from poisonous ores to affect the health, and no doubt the worst feature of penal servitude in Siberia was not the hard labour in the mines but the almost inconceivably foul condition and enforced idleness of the prisons.

Returning now to the Kara prisons, seven in number, two of them were allotted to politicals, one for each sex, and of the remaining five the total population was approximately eighteen hundred convicts. Half of them were detained as prisoners; the other half were permitted generally to join the "free command." The latter were still convicts, receiving rations and restricted to the settlement, but residing in barracks or in their own houses. The prison building of Ust Kara, at the Lower Digging, is compared by Kennan to "a long, low, horse-car stable made of squared but unpainted logs, which are now black, weather-beaten, and decaying from age." It was in the form of a square surrounded by logs twenty-five feet high, closely set together, and sharpened at the top like enormous lead pencils. Entrance was gained after ascending a few steps through a heavy wooden door opening upon a long, low and very dark corridor with a wet, slippery floor, much broken and damaged. The first sensation was that of damp air laden with the fetid odours that constantly vitiate all Siberian prisons. Kennan was unable to compare it to any known bad smell. He says, "I can ask you to imagine cellar

air, every atom of which has been half a dozen times through human lungs and is heavy with carbonic acid; to imagine that air still further vitiated by foul, pungent, slightly ammoniacal exhalations from long unwashed human bodies. . . . To unaccustomed senses, it seems so saturated with foulness and disease as to be almost insupportable. As we entered the corridor, slipped upon the wet, filthy floor, and caught the first breath of this air, Major Potulov (the commandant) turned to me with a scowl of disgust, and exclaimed, 'It is a repulsive prison.' " In the cells there was absolutely no ventilation whatever. Even the brick oven drew its air from the corridor. The walls of squared logs had once been whitewashed, but had become dark and grimy, and were blotched in many places with extensive bloodstains, the life blood of countless insatiable enemies, bed-bugs, crushed to death in unceasing warfare. The floor was deeply encrusted with dry, hard-trodden filth. The sloping wooden platforms on which the convicts slept side by side, closely packed, without bedding or covering, were inconceivably dirty. All the cells were the same except that in one a shoemaker's bench diffused the quite pleasing odour of fresh leather.

Small wonder that contagious diseases were rife in such an atmosphere; scurvy, typhus and typhoid constantly prevailed and the prison surgeon admitted that the first was endemic, saying, "We have more or less scurvy here all the year round." The in-

fects were not at once removed to hospital, but lay there to pollute and poison the air breathed by their comparatively healthy comrades. All the conditions of this were so manifestly odious that the commandant did not attempt to explain, defend or excuse them, but, as Kennan tells us, "he grew more and more silent, moody and morose as we went through the *kameras*." He knew too well that it was beyond his power to remedy the abounding evil; he might listen to grievances, hear petitions and complaints, but was powerless to relieve them.

The middle Kara prison was on precisely similar lines, but the air was fresher during the day time, when the bulk of the inmates were absent at the mines, to which the hard-labour prisoners proceeded in the early morning and where they spent the day. Their midday meal was taken with them, to be eaten beside the camp fire in any weather, even the fiercest winter storms. They returned to the prison late in the afternoon, and dined on a fairly good meal of hot soup, bread and meat and a cup of brick tea. This they ate on their sleeping platforms, and passed the night without removing their clothing.

The gold "placers" at Kara were generally in deep gravel pits, and the auriferous sand was located beneath a stratum of clay, gravel or stones, in what had once been the bed of the stream. The work consisted in breaking up and removing this overlying stratum, extracting the gold bearing sand and carrying it to the machine, where it was washed

in several waters which in flowing away left deposits of black sand and gold particles. Pick and crowbar were in constant use by the convict labourers, working in their leg irons silently and listlessly under the close surveillance of a cordon of Cossack sentries. The average daily task was of ten hours, but much time was lost in going to and fro, and the annual amount washed was some four hundred pounds. A large quantity of gold was stolen by the surreptitious washing of convicts of the free command. They disposed of it to "receivers," who ran great risks but generally managed to smuggle it across the frontier. This illicit trade flourishes in spite of the fact that it is a penal offence to be in possession of the precious metal or "golden wheat," as it is technically called. But the great profits accruing outbalance the risks, and small speculators are always to be found who will secretly buy the stolen treasure secured by the convicts at large.

One notorious criminal at Kara living in the free command acquired considerable wealth by illicit trade in "stolen gold." His name was Lissenko, and his crimes had been many and heinous. In one of his robberies he murdered a whole family, men, women and children. Leo Deutsch came across him and describes him as a man of about sixty years who had still the strength of a giant. He says: "He struck me as being crafty, cunning and reckless, but not a malicious kind of fellow, and he was extremely pious withal. No one who knew

him personally could easily believe him to have murdered innocent children." Deutsch asked him how he could have the heart to kill a child. "Oh, I cried all the time I was doing it," he replied, "but still I killed them. It was just God's will." His questioner then asked, "Well, and would you murder me if you met me in a safe place?" "If I knew you had a lot of money about you I should certainly wring your neck," said the man, with cheerful frankness. "But there! one doesn't kill without some good reason."

The search for gold, belonging really to the government, or more exactly to the Czar, was almost openly practised at Kara. Whole families, both men and women, engaged in it, taking out with them a shovel and wooden vessel to the banks of the neighbouring streams, and often obtaining gold dust to the value of a couple of rubles a day. No one protested, and the authorities hardly interfered, for the officials themselves did not scruple to profit by the illegal trade. Far more gold was obtained by unlawful than lawful means. The middlemen got a good price from the Chinese traders, who could always find a way to pass the gold into China, where it would fetch a higher price than that paid by the imperial exchequer. It is contended that these illicit gold finders have greatly benefited Siberia. Their restless energy in prospecting has led to the discovery of numberless gold mines, which are now being very profitably worked, seldom to the en-

richment of the finders, but to that of the middlemen and through them to that of the country.

The glaring shortcomings of Eastern Siberian prisons were gradually recognised by the government, and a commendable, if not extensive, attempt has been made to provide new and improved buildings, both to serve as forwarding prisons, and for the confinement of penal-servitude convicts. A larger scheme was introduced for the penal colonisation of the island of Saghalien by the deportation of exiles thither by sea, of which I shall have much more to say. The best of the new prisons on the mainland are those of Alexandrovsk, forty miles above Irkutsk on the Amgara River, of Gorni Zerentui at the Nertchinsk mines, and of Verkhni Udinsk, fifty miles east of Lake Baikal and six hundred miles from Kara.

The prison of Alexandrovsk, which was visited by the untiring investigator, Kennan, had been originally built to serve as a distillery, but was reconstructed and turned into a great central prison in 1874. When Kennan was there, it held about a thousand prisoners and was deemed to be almost a model prison. It is a large two-storied brick building with a tin roof, standing in a spacious enclosure surrounded by a high, buttressed brick wall. It contains fifty-seven general cells, in each of which from five to seventy-five occupants are locked up; ten cells for separate confinement, and five secret cells for the isolation of the most dangerous

and refractory prisoners. The cells, as Kennan found, were large and lofty; the ventilation was good and the air pure; floors and sleeping rooms were kept scrupulously clean, the only fault in the latter being the absence of bedding. The corridors outside the cells were spacious, well lighted, and the air was wholesome. Neatness, cleanliness and good order prevailed in the great kitchen; the food prepared was palatable and good. The daily rations per week consisted of three pounds of rye bread, seven ounces of meat, three ounces of barley, with potatoes and other vegetables occasionally. The prisoners were permitted to purchase tea and sugar out of their own earnings and private funds. A schoolroom, well furnished and supplied, existed in the prison, and there were many citizens' shops, — carpenters, shoemakers, and tailors, — and two-thirds of the money earned was at the disposal of the handicraftsmen. Other labour intended to be "hard" was enforced at the mills, where rye seed was ground into meal and where the prisoners worked for three or four hours daily. At night the *kamera* was crowded and dimly lighted; and when visited, was not quite so sweet and odourless as during the daytime, but, on the whole, the prison was infinitely superior to the foul dens already described.

Mr. Foster Fraser, the English traveller, who saw the Alexandrovsk central prison in 1901-2, gives a no less favourable report. He describes it as a great square building, with lofty corridors, colour washed,

and with sanded floors, the *kameras* containing on an average fifty men each. The prisoners, who hailed from all parts of the polyglot and scattered Russian Empire, were criminals of the worst stamp, mostly heavy-jowled, sullen, brutish men, but there were some few young and innocent looking lads. In the cells large numbers lounged away the day in complete idleness, but all asked for employment, and were glad to get it by being taken into the various shops. Some were clever and skilful at particular trades, cabinet-making, tailoring, bookbinding, designing patent locks, watch-mending or making musical instruments. The impression conveyed was that of workshops of well contented artisans. Conversation was general and many were smoking cigarettes. Care was taken to classify prisoners by their religions; Mahometans, Tartars and Caucasians were kept together in one hall; Jews were in another with their synagogue hard by. The desire to brighten the gloomy surroundings was to be seen in the existence of a theatre with stage and scenery, where excellent amateur performances were given, and also musical entertainments, for singing was much cultivated and there was no lack of good voices among the convicts. A large library was kept up, to which free access was permitted for several hours daily to those who could read, by no means a large proportion.

There is a second Alexandrovsk prison, one of the *étapes*, or forwarding prisons, newly built in

1886-8, and on good lines, but much handicapped by the common blot on all such places, overcrowding. Great numbers, far in excess of available accommodation, were collected here, awaiting distribution to various points. Mr. Fraser's verdict on this *étape* prison is unfavourable. "The rooms were overcrowded and the stench almost choked me. The men looked dirty and uncared for. They had no work; they were just huddled together, waiting often six or eight months before they were sent off. Among them were half a dozen young fellows in ordinary clothes, with nothing of the criminal about them, the youngest seventeen, the eldest twenty-one. They were political exiles banished by 'administrative process' for rashly joining in some socialistic demonstration, and were on their way to Yakutsk into the frozen depths of the sub-Arctic Circle."

Verkhni Udinsk is the first halting place after leaving Lake Baikal on the road to Kara, and all exiles to Eastern Siberia passed through it, including the political prisoners. For many years the *étape* prison there was one of the foulest on the whole route. It is to the credit of the Russian government that this abominable prison has been abolished and replaced (in 1886) by a new forwarding prison constructed on the most approved lines. It is a large building of four stories, built of brick, with a stucco front painted white, and having two spacious wings, a large inner courtyard and separate buildings for political prisoners and military

guard. The *kameras* are even better than those at Alexandrovsk, large, lofty, well ventilated, and each above the basement floor has an extensive view across the surrounding country through at least three large windows. The corridors and imposing staircases, and even the solitary confinement cells, are of large size. It was built to lodge 440, but of course was constantly occupied by a much larger number. When Mr. Kennan expressed his unbounded approval of the very best prison he had seen in Russia, or indeed in any country, his conductor assented, "Yes; if they do not overcrowd it, it will be very comfortable. But as the old prison intended for 140 was often filled with as many as seven hundred, we shall probably be expected to find room for three thousand in this." I have come across no later information on this point, and it is to be hoped that the substitution of the sea passage to Saghalien has had a beneficial effect in reducing the numbers passing along the land route, and that the Verkhni Udinsk prison has sufficed to meet the demands on its accommodation.

After very considerable delay, a new prison at Gorni Zerentui, to serve for the Nertchinsk mines, was completed in 1888. The crying need for such a prison was first realised in 1872, and in 1874 a committee was appointed to report and submit plans. Seven years later no more progress had been made than the erection of a few log huts and the repair of some older buildings, on which nearly 40,000 dol-

lars had been expended. Constant changes of plan had tended to vexatious delay. Opinions were divided as to whether brick or logs was the most suitable material, but preference was finally given to the latter, because the prison could not be permanent, as the mines were certain to become worked out. But already brick had been employed and the building was far forward, so it was at length completed, and was occupied at the date given.

The advantages offered by the island of Saghalien as a place for penal settlement were very early impressed upon Russian prison administrators. They were rather sentimental than physical, for the island was perhaps as unsuitable for human habitation as any place on the face of the globe. The climate was uncongenial, and worse even than its latitude indicated. Alexandrovsk, the chief town, is in the same latitude as Brighton in England, and yet its mean annual temperature is just below freezing point. No sea current wafted any warmth northward from Chinese waters. On the contrary, a bitterly cold stream swept its eastern coast, issuing from the ice-bound sea of Okhotsk, and the western shores of this narrow elongated island are, so to speak, under an immense refrigerator, the snowy mountain tracts of Siberia, separated from it by only a narrow and shallow channel. Sparse sunlight pierced through the heavy clouds and fogs that enveloped this inhospitable land. The milder season was too brief to allow of great success in the ger-

mination of crops, and the long, low valleys between the mountains were too damp and marshy to favour agriculture. Dense forests clothed a large portion of the island, containing poor trees of inferior, stunted growth, with comparatively valueless wood. A scant population of degenerate tribes eked out a wretched existence as fishermen and seal hunters. Few settlers came to it from China or Japan.

The report of experts definitely decided against Saghalien as an agricultural colony. The soil forbade all hope of raising grain to support those who worked it. Food must be imported to maintain life; cattle breeding might succeed, but with difficulty, and fish must remain the staple diet. One source of natural wealth which might be developed was the coal fields, in which the island was supposed to be rich, but the quality of the coal was inferior to the Australian and very much below that of Newcastle and Cardiff. Mr. Hawes, a later traveller (1903), contests this, however, and describes the coal as a good lignite, superior to the Japanese as a steam coal, and says it commands a higher price. As an article of commerce, it suffers from the difficulties of lading for export. There is not a single harbour on the whole circumference of the island, and approach is often hindered by want of beacons and constantly prevailing fogs.

Coal mining in Saghalien began in 1858, and some 30,000 tons were extracted during the first ten years. The production was very costly; the

mines were worked by candle light ; the ore was bad and much mixed with stone. The largest deposits are upon the western coast, and it is mined chiefly at Dui and Vladiminsk. Mr. Hawes saw a seam of brown coal exposed on the banks of the river Tim. At Vladiminsk the coal was on the ground, level, and easily reached by tunnelling into the cliff, and when it failed at one spot, another was soon discovered. The coal sells to the merchants at twelve shillings per ton, of which the convicts now employed receive ten per cent.

The adoption of Saghalien as a penal colony commended itself to the authorities for several reasons. In the first place, the conditions of life were more irksome than on the mainland ; the work would, it was thought, be much harder ; and the place itself was wilder, more savage and solitary, — all of which would combine to increase the severity of the punishment. Moreover, the prospect of remaining forever as a settler upon a remote island, after the term of hard labour was accomplished, would still further act as a deterrent to crime. Accordingly, it was resolved to inflict this harsher penalty upon recidivists and recaptured fugitives, the *brodyagi*, or runaway convicts, of whom so many thousands were always at large and who, when recaptured, as well as all the “ Ivan-don’t-remembers ” who would not tell their names, were sentenced to penal servitude for a fresh term of four years in Saghalien. Again, Saghalien by sea was

better than Siberia by *étape* process, with its long painful journey, the sufferings it entailed on the travellers, and the burden of corruption inflicted upon the local population by the way. Last of all, it would tend to free Siberia of the convict element, and assist the colonisation and development of the new territory, with manifest benefit to the convicts on release by the opportunities offered for rehabilitation and betterment of character and position.

These were the views expressed by Governor-General Anuchin in his famous reports to the Czar in 1880. But they had already taken effect, and deportation to Saghalien had begun practically some years previously. The first body of convicts, eight hundred in number, were sent there in 1869, but they went across the whole continent of Asia, having already travelled from Russia, and descending the long length of the Amur River, some two thousand miles, completed a total journey of 4,700 miles before reaching its mouth at Nikolaevsk, where they arrived decimated by disease and all more or less suffering from scurvy. After that, sea transportation was used, the party starting from Odessa and voyaging through the Suez Canal by the Red Sea, Indian and Northern Pacific Oceans, but under very neglected and imperfect conditions, so that those who embarked were subjected to terrible privations and cruelties on this voyage half round the world.

As time passed, and the last century drew to its close, deportation direct to Saghalien steadily in-

creased. Twice a year the steamer *Yaroslav*, one of the Russian volunteer fleet, the appointed convict ship, performed its sad mission and brought out its living freight of eight hundred exiles from Odessa. Besides these, many hundreds regularly arrived from the mainland, who were convicts due to become exiled settlers. The latest law provided that the penal colony should be the receptacle of all males sentenced to more than two years, of all females not over forty years of age, sentenced to the same period, and of any political prisoner at the discretion of the imperial government. Criminals, on arrival, are classified according to their sentences and located in the various gaols in the three administrative districts of Alexandrovsk, Timovsk and Korsakovsk. The largest prison centre is at the first named; the second in importance is at Korsakovsk; and there are two prisons in the Timovsk district, one at Derbensk, the other at Rikovsk.

When Mr. Hawes visited the island in 1902, he found a principal gaol at Alexandrovsk known as the "testing," or probation prison, for the worst criminals, those with a sentence of twelve years and upward, whose fetters are not removed and who are confined in a quarter styled the "chained" prison. There is a second prison known as the "reformatory," for those with lesser sentences, into which convicts from the testing prison, after passing a minimum of four years, may be promoted. These last-named prisoners are permitted to work

in gangs beyond the walls, under escort, without very strict discipline, so that many leave their parties to work on their own account in various forms of depredation. The "ticket-of-leave" men, or free commands, were entered on the lists of the reformatory prison and included the vagrants, *brodyagi*, who were deported after recapture on the mainland. Immediate release from jail is the boon conceded to any convict, even the very worst, whose freeborn wife has elected to come out from Russia and join him. He becomes then an exile settler of one of the "peasant" class, so-called, whom it is hoped will assist colonisation. The same boon is conceded to female convicts. "Free" husbands, however, are not often eager to share their lot. According to Mr. Hawes, there were only six of these loyal spouses on the whole island. But the women convicts have the chance of being chosen to join in a convict marriage or temporary coupling of parties, which is not only permitted but strongly encouraged. The consequences of such unions are deplorable. The effect on the woman is most demoralising, and too often the offspring, when children are born, have inherited the criminal taint. The civil contract cannot be entered into without divorce in the case where a husband still exists in Russia, although many widows have simplified the matter by murdering their husbands before leaving home, often, indeed, the cause of their deportation. Figures quoted for one year, 1897, show that there

were 2,836 murderers in durance upon the island, and a much larger number if ex-convicts were included, and of this total, 634 were women who had murdered their husbands. Clergymen on Saghalien refused to give a religious sanction to these civil contracts unless there had been a formal dissolution of the Russian marriage. The civil bond sat lightly on both parties; the women in particular elected to go their own way, and if interfered with or if they found their marriage ill-assorted or irksome, they at once transferred themselves to some other master. The results of this outrage upon the most sacred of human institutions must assuredly lead to its abolition; they are identically the same as reported by Mr. George Griffith to be the case in New Caledonia. He says: "I saw about seventy-six separate and distinct reasons for the abolition of convict marriages at the convict school. On every face and form were stamped the unmistakable brand of criminality, imbecility, moral crookedness and general degeneration."

The testing prison at Alexandrovsk generally held some six hundred inmates, many of them in chains and most of them in idleness; a few, barely ten or twelve per cent., were occasionally sent out to be employed in mining, road-making and log-hauling; and the authorities justified this limitation by the plea that the majority of them were such desperate characters that they could not safely be suffered to go beyond the walls. The unutterable

weariness of long-continued, unbroken idleness bore so heavily upon this mass of caged and shackled humanity that desperate and determined attempts at escape were of constant occurrence. So great was their longing to be free that they would willingly risk their lives to breathe the fresh air. The only break in the dull round of prison life was surreptitious gambling. They would sacrifice everything to secure the means of play; they would stake the government clothing issued, and even their rations a month ahead. In the latter case, as an alternative to punishment, the convict put himself in pawn to the authorities. He was lodged in a separate cell and allowed himself to be starved for two days out of every three; the rations saved were accumulated and placed to his credit for the payment of his debt.

The conditions of life at Alexandrovsk not strangely incited the prisoners to turbulence, insubordination and the commission of crime whenever the chance came. When at large, even for a short time after successful escape, they were veritable brigands, robbing and slaughtering; when once more incarcerated, they were intractable and incorrigible, and no punishment could affright or keep them in order.

The older brutal methods survive in Saghalien. Physical tortures are superadded to the infliction of prolonged sentences. As to the latter, many convicts are well advanced in life with unexpired sen-

tences of forty or fifty years. Hawes tells us he found thirteen in this class, and fifty-one others, one of them a woman, with sentences of from thirty to forty years, and 240 with from twenty to thirty years of unexpired sentences. He also found a couple of offenders chained to wheelbarrows, and the number had been much larger not long before,

Employment of corporal punishment has for the most part disappeared in Russian and Siberian prisons; its infliction at Kara on Madame Sigida in 1889, and the universal horror inspired throughout the civilised world by this terrible catastrophe, largely led to its abandonment; but the practice is still in force in Saghalien. Until 1902 females were flogged with the *rozgi*, birch rods dipped in salt. The infliction was within the power of the chief of the prison, and although it might be lightly, was ever arbitrarily imposed. It was not an excessively cruel, but a most brutal and disgraceful punishment. But the plet still flourishes, although the leaded ends are said to have been replaced by knots, and may be a very terrible weapon in the hands of a skilful flagellator. Until recently, it was worthy to replace the murderous knout of ancient times. The patient was very much at the mercy of the executioner, the so-called *palach*, a salaried convict-official, to whom his comrades paid tribute in the Saghalien prison in food and tobacco, to curry favour with him and persuade him to lay the leaded

ends of the lash so as to catch the wooden flogging bench rather than their bare backs. The *palach* spared his victim at very considerable risk, and might be flogged for neglect of duty. In one case, an offending executioner, by name Komeleva, was punished and flogged by the hands of his particular enemy. So terrible was the infliction that although it incurred in 1882, a photograph taken of the wounds in 1899, seventeen years afterwards, showed them to be still suppurating. Three strokes of the plet were sufficient to kill, and another story is told of a convict at Saghalien who promised the *palach* a bottle of vodka if he would not hit him with the leaded ends. The victim was a hardened veteran, and when he had received ninety-five strokes, thinking he had escaped, he called out, "It's no matter; you can't hurt me now, you needn't think you'll get your vodka." But he had not reckoned with his man, for after three more strokes he was dead. It was only necessary to draw back the plet as the stroke was spent for the ends to injure the liver and send a clot of blood to the heart.

CHAPTER X

SAGHALIEN

Failure of the scheme to utilise Saghalien as a convict settlement — Testimony of an official on the terrible condition of the exiles — Gambling and drunkenness universal — Prevalence of immorality — The prisons hot beds of vice — No classification of the prisoners — Convicts refuse to settle on the island as colonists at the expiration of their sentence — Account of two assassinations at Alexandrovsk — Description of the cemetery there — Female murderers on the island — Sophie Bluffstein, called the "Golden Hand" — Her adventurous career of crime — Sent to Saghalien as a political prisoner — Carried on criminal operations when released — Recaptured and again confined — Finally released and settled on the island until her death — The merchant of Alexandrovsk and his unfaithful wife — The vagrants in Saghalien — Barratasvili — His capture and death — Horrible story of the fate which befell the convict road-makers — Politicals on Saghalien — Their terrible sufferings.

THE day will come when Russia, like the rest of the world, will learn that it cannot finally dispose of its worst elements by shooting them down on some distant dust heap. Siberia will act in its own defence as did Australia, and refuse to be forever the dumping ground for criminals. The prosperous development of that vast and richly endowed territory has been too long delayed and already a change is imminent. Enterprise has been stimulated by

the construction of the great Trans-Siberian railway. As Siberia grows in wealth and importance it will surely resent and repudiate the exile system, whether enforced by the improved methods of railway travelling or facilitated by sea communications.

The old idea of removal still obtains, although an effort has been made to avoid the horrors of the prolonged pilgrimage on land, by substituting the long sea voyage from Odessa, through the Suez canal and the southern seas to far Saghalien. Banishment to that convict colony, although half the island has passed to the victorious Japanese, will still survive, despite its manifest failure.

After the experience of a quarter of a century, it may be most unhesitatingly asserted that the net result of the deportation to Saghalien has been most disappointing. Failure has met the Russian government on every side. Transportation has fulfilled none of the aims of penal legislation, has been neither reformatory nor deterrent, but merely painful and punitive without any return in benefit to the colony. The island has made no progress; its scanty natural resources have been little utilised, and no return has been obtained from the cultivation of the indifferent soil. At the best period, barely one-tenth of the convicts qualifying for conditional freedom, and labouring to become proprietors of farms with lands cleared and stocked with cattle, were of any value in carrying on the work; of the remaining nine-tenths, half had no heart in

it, and the other half were frankly idlers and vagabonds hanging about the settlements, looking for free rations, and when the issue ceased, ranging the country as masterless men depending on theft and depredation for their bare living.

The social atmosphere was vitiated, and noxious evil elements predominated; general depravity had become almost universal. It was the old story of Australian transportation, and the later experience of New Caledonia. Once more, penal exile stands condemned as a secondary punishment, showing the same absence of any redeeming or compensating features in the improvement of these new lands or the amelioration of the individual. The system must be still more barren of results in the future, now that the southern half of the island — the part most favourable to agriculture — has been surrendered to Japan as part of the last war indemnity. This will seriously diminish the amount of land available for the "exile settlers," as they are called.

The efforts made to colonise have been feeble and fruitless. Convict labourers were set to clear the forests and reclaim waste lands, but in a desultory, half-hearted fashion, without skill or knowledge, and wielding primitive instruments and imperfect tools. Much time was wasted in covering long distances to draw rations, and depending upon the administration for advances to provide seed and stock, both inadequate in quantity and of very inferior quality. As a general rule, the settlers were

physically unfit for the work in hand; their health was not robust; they soon aged and broke down under the rough conditions of daily life. All were crushed with indebtedness to the government for advances, and also to private usurers who supplied means for self-indulgence. A fierce passion for gambling consumed them, and drunkenness was universal. Vodka was smuggled in freely from Japan, and numbers of illicit stills manufactured it secretly upon the island. One of the principal officials spoke as follows of the deplorable state of things:—

“Convict life on Saghalien is a frightful nightmare. It is a compound of debauchery, insolence and bravado, mixed with real suffering from hardship and privation, and tainted indelibly with crime and corruption.” Children born on or brought to the island are educated in the worst vices, and when still of tender years are already profligate or depraved. Modesty does not exist; young girls of twelve and thirteen are invariably seduced and abandoned to prostitution; men enter into the civil marriage so as to profit by the immorality of their temporary wives; many female convicts are retained in government hands, simply to purvey concubines for the colonial officials. The unsavoury and shameless relations of the sexes are among the principal reasons why colonisation has absolutely failed. There is no virtue among the female residents of Saghalien, whether they are “free” women who

have come out voluntarily to join husbands or parents, or those condemned to deportation. The latter are in many respects better placed than the former, for they receive government shelter and allowances in food.

The prisons on the island are hot-beds of vice; all classes of offenders are herded together, with no system of classification but the one based upon the length of sentence. An attempt has been made to separate the uncondemned awaiting trial from the recidivist and hardened offender, but the division is not carried far, and too often the association is indiscriminate, and the wholly bad habitual criminals mix freely with the less hardened wrongdoers, who are rapidly corrupted and debased by their evil surroundings. The worst elements are concentrated in the "testing" prison of Alexandrovsk, including those who have graduated and grown gray in crime on the mainland. Prison discipline is generally slack and ineffective, and from ill-judged economy the staff of warders is too weak for supervision and control. The officers themselves are often of inferior stamp, drunken, untrustworthy, overbearing, given to "trafficking" with the prisoners, accepting bribes for the clandestine introduction of strong drink, or to assist in escapes, quick to oppress and misuse their charges.

Another impediment to colonisation is the noted and invincible dislike to the place constantly present in the minds of the enforced colonists or exiled class

at large. No ex-convict would willingly remain on Saghalien. When their terms of detention are ended, all want to turn their backs on the island forever. Nothing would reconcile one to continued residence, not even the acquisition of comparative wealth and the possession of lands and herds, a house to shelter him, and domestic ties. Anyone who can happily scrape together the necessary means hungers to spend it in paying his passage home. He must possess his soul in patience for a long time. Six years must be spent as an exile settler after release from his prison probation; six more as a peasant, and then only permission is granted to cross to the mainland, but never to return to St. Petersburg or Moscow. Now and again a fugitive — and there is a large percentage of escapes as we shall see — may reach home, but he is in constant danger of rearrest. One political prisoner actually succeeded in reaching the capital, but had the bad luck to meet in the streets of St. Petersburg a gendarme officer who knew him. He was recognised and sharply interrogated. "How did you manage to come so far, and what brings you here?" asked the officer. "This brought me," replied the exile, as he promptly drew his revolver and shot his inconvenient questioner down. Arrest followed immediately, and trial, with a fresh sentence of fifteen years. Once more he was sent to Saghalien, where he is still living as an exile settler with small hope of a second enlargement.

There are occasional, but very rare, exceptions among ex-convicts who elect to remain and settle down in the colony. Mr. Hawes tells us of one, a Cossack from the Caucasus, probably an old insurgent, who, with tireless industry, had made himself a home at the village of Uskovo on the upper waters of river Tim, some fifty miles from Alexandrovsk. This man with infinite labour had cleared enough of the primeval forest to sow a respectable crop of corn, some 150 puds or upwards of 5,000 English pounds, which returned him a twelvefold crop. He was a careful farmer, and sowed his seed with judgment, unlike most of the peasants who scattered it at one place insufficiently and at another in excess. Yet good harvests might be secured by steady industry, were the peasants only willing to give agriculture a fair trial. Another similar case was that of a free-command convict, whose wife had followed him out from Europe. He was permitted to live with her outside the prison on condition that he performed his allotted task of hard labour, which was to haul tree trunks into Alexandrovsk to the number of one hundred and twenty. He was energetic and thrifty, and by the aid of a loan from the crown purchased a number of draught ponies to help him in hauling, by which means he contrived to get a certain amount of spare time to work on his own account. He had struck a new idea, inspired by the fact that a steady traffic in oxen and ponies, bound to the town bazaar or

market, constantly passed his door. He established a sort of livery stable in a little courtyard adjoining his cottage, where he provided shelter for the cattle and sleeping places for the drovers on beds of hay. He soon did a large business and prospered greatly.

Sometimes there was a sad slip between the cup and the lip. It is on record that an exile settler by unremitting diligence had put by enough to pay for his passage home at the expiration of his term of exile. On his way to Alexandrovsk, he was resting on a bridge when another villager of the free command came and seated himself alongside. Suddenly, as they chatted pleasantly together, the newcomer knocked the other senseless with a heavy blow on the head, and having rifled his body, dropped it into the stream running below. He thus became possessed of his victim's pocket-book containing his money and the certificate of the expiration of his sentence. Fate was adverse, however, and when he proceeded to make use of his ill-gotten gains, the certificate was recognised as the property of the deceased. Arrest and detention were followed by full discovery of the crime and its punishment.

At Saghalien there was no security to life and property in the towns and still less safety in the interior, which was ravaged and harassed by the vagrant convicts, continually moving to and fro. Murder was committed daringly and unblushingly on the smallest temptation, such as the possession

of even a small sum of money. When Mr. Hawes was at Alexandrovsk, he met when on his way to church a couple of men just out of hospital who had evidently been drinking. One of them reeled a little in his walk and was manifestly drunk. Within a few hours this luckless creature lay, a corpse, in the market place. He had been murdered by his companion for the six or seven rubles he carried in his pocket. Three days later, a man living near the market place imprudently sat near the lamp at an open window, and was shot through it. Hawes describes the cemetery he visited on a hill to the north of the town; it was filled with wooden crosses, black, brown and green, clustering thickly, and much the same epitaph was inscribed on all, "Here lies — murdered — 18—." No mention was made of the assassin; that was quite unnecessary. The victims were buried both singly and in groups of three, four or five. The theatre of the crime was usually the market place or bazaar near-by, where quarrels were frequent and weapons such as knives, daggers and revolvers were constantly employed. Murderous assaults and hand-to-hand fights were repeated almost daily, and the police seldom took notice of the disturbance. Men were often pointed out in the open road who had half a dozen or more murders to their credit. Mr. Hawes saw one hovering near his hut who had slain eight victims, and it seemed inexplicable that such a miscreant should be suffered to be still at

liberty. His immunity was due to his prompt escape into the *taiga* or wild, wooded interior. Convicts who did so might be captured some day, but were seldom identified or there was insufficient evidence to secure their conviction. The authorities, too, were generally callous when one villain murdered another, philosophically saying, "After all the brutal crowd has been well diminished by one." Of course if an official was murdered, more serious steps were taken to bring the offender to justice. A Saghalien murderer was known to have committed the capital offence nineteen times, and still evaded punishment.

Female murderers were plentiful enough on Saghalien, and one of the most remarkable was a certain Sophie Bluffstein, commonly called the "Golden Hand." As a criminal, she had few equals among wrong-doers in any land. She was a Jewess, who, as a girl of rare beauty, had married a man of her own race, a financial agent, but she left him when his affairs became entangled. She developed into a cosmopolitan adventuress who made the capitals of Europe her stage, and was well known in London, Paris, Vienna and St. Petersburg. Her business was to victimise tradesmen and attract lovers over whom she gained extraordinary influence. Her frauds were extensive and on the well-known lines. She lived in great style in a smart house, in the most fashionable part of the city, and drove in her carriage to the best shops

where she made large purchases of jewelry and valuables, for which, of course, she never paid. Her depredations were on a colossal scale and she was "wanted" by the entire police of Europe.

Sophie Bluffstein's personal fascination was unrivalled. Her chief charms were her wonderful eyes, which seemed to have had magnetic effect upon her admirers and drew them irresistibly to her feet, tempting them to commit any crime to secure her good graces. One of her greatest triumphs was the beguilement of the governor of Smolensk, where she had been arrested and incarcerated. Her influence over him was such that she induced him to connive at her escape, to desert his wife and family, and to accompany her in her flight. The connection was brief, and she resumed her evil courses, until she was caught in a trap at a gay supper party of young men, some of whom were terrorists, and which was broken up by the police. Arrested as a political offender, she was sent to Siberia, where in due course she escaped, was recaptured and deported to Saghalien.

Here she renewed her criminal activity, and when released from prison to enter the free command, she gathered round her a choice collection of the worst characters, whom she employed as her tools in the crimes she planned and had carried out. In one case, a merchant, carrying on his person a large sum in rubles, was robbed and murdered. The money was so cleverly buried by her that it has not

yet been discovered. Her operations were greatly aided by a ship her confederates had seized and openly used as a pirate craft. To check her villainies, she was shut up at last in the testing prison at Alexandrovsk and kept constantly handcuffed. Yet she eventually regained her liberty, and after living more peaceably for a time at Rikovsk, she was allowed to settle at Vladivostok, where she kept an inn until her death.

That life was held cheap at Saghalien will be shown by the following story. A merchant of Alexandrovsk had reason to suspect his wife, a young and beautiful Tartar woman, of infidelity, and when he upbraided her she ran off and left him. She was never seen again, and it came out afterward that he had hired an assassin at the price of twenty-five rubles to kill her, according to the provisions of the Mahometan law. The assassin and his employer quarreled over the ghastly business, and the latter simplified the matter by hiring a second assassin to murder the first. But the second murder was not so successfully accomplished as the first; the victim escaped; the merchant was arrested, and a witness came forward to say she had seen him preparing a noose to hang his wife on his own account. No arrest was made for some time, and even the merchant was let out on bail.

Thefts and highway robbery were of constant occurrence, and burglaries also, both of private houses and government stores. There was a large

floating population of desperadoes, which was continually recruited by the fugitives from justice, prison-breakers and vagrants from the free commands, and exile settlers who preferred depredation to industry. The *brodyaga* was a greater scourge in Saghalien than in Siberia, another and a potential check to the development of the colony on account of the terrorism exercised over the well-disposed settler, whom he robbed and maltreated. They worked generally in organised gangs, armed with stolen rifles which they readily used. The most dangerous gang was that of which the chief and captain was the notorious Barratasvili, the Robin Hood of the island, whose feats are still remembered.

Barratasvili came to Saghalien first as an exiled forger, and he passed through his prison probation with an exemplary character. He was looked upon as a mild and well-disposed man, quite amenable to discipline. When he joined the free command, he became a domestic servant and continued to be well-conducted until suddenly he ran off and escaped to Nicholaevsk on the mainland. He was pursued, taken and brought back to Saghalien, only to give his escort the slip and gain the recess of the forest, where he all but died of starvation. By the murder of a merchant on his way from Dui to Alexandrovsk carrying the price of a horse he had lately sold, Barratasvili obtained funds and became the leader of the band which soon began to ravage

the district. He was like the typical brigand, waging war with the rich but in sympathy with the poor, whom he succoured instead of attacking. He was daring and unscrupulous in his robberies, shooting "at sight" all who offered the slightest resistance. As he became more and more reckless and his crimes multiplied, the hue and cry was raised against him, and wide plans were laid to capture him, all of which he successfully evaded, still boldly showing himself where he was most "wanted."

On one occasion at Alexandrovsk, a strong detachment of soldiers searched the town, house by house, in the small hours of the morning, bent upon taking him, but quite fruitlessly. Yet four hours after the search had begun, he was seen by a friend in the neighbourhood passing along the street with no more disguise than being muffled up in a fur-lined coat. Again, he entered a store in the town and having posted a sentry to keep watch, proceeded to ransack the place, emptying the counter cases of their jewelry, the tills and the safes of their cash. The recklessness of these thieves was so great that they entered the town and had their photographs taken.

But the net was closing round Barratasvili. A combined effort was set on foot to put an end to him and his gang. It was winter time when the end came. Overcome with fatigue, he one day ventured off the road into the forest close to a deserted saw-mill, and with his companions fell

asleep. An overseer, trudging along the road, noticed the tracks of his skis, and they aroused his suspicions. Ordinary travellers do not leave the road to plunge into the deep snow of the dense forest. He, too, was tired, but he went back to Derbensk and secured the assistance of a posse of soldiers. Following up the track, step by step, through the forest, they came upon the long-sought robbers resting. The alarm was given. Firing began on both sides. The leader of the gang was hit in the left shoulder, but still continued to fire. The soldiers sought shelter behind tree trunks. Barratasvili, in taking aim, exposed his head and in so doing was shot in the forehead. Their leader killed, his companions threw down their arms, were taken and beaten by the soldiers with the butt ends of their muskets. In encounters of this kind, the soldiers, furious at the loss of their comrades, treat their captives most brutally, and in some cases the latter have died from injuries thus received. Three of the four companions of Barratasvili were hanged at the corners of the testing prison at Alexandrovsk. In theory, capital punishment is supposed to have been abolished in Russia, but the sentence is still passed by court-martial and the island of Saghalien in under martial law. These *brodyagi* were really strangled, not hanged. A rope with a slip-knot was fixed round the neck of the culprit, the other end being carried up and made taut to a crosspiece supported by two upright poles. The convict stood

on a box, which was kicked away from under his feet, and strangulation often tardily ensued.

The *brodyagi* had little hope of permanent evasion. Now and again a few determined fugitives have seized a boat and attempted a passage across the sea to the mainland. They might win through the dangers of the sea, having evaded the native trackers, half savage men of the Gilyak tribe, more ready to shoot down than to capture, and they might make good their landing at Cape Muraviev or Pogob. But they must face starvation and almost certain death from the terrible winter cold. The alternative is voluntary surrender, with the certainty of flogging and a prolongation of sentence. More frequently, the *brodyagi* infest the *taiga* and hang about the sparse settlements on the chance of plunder, or, if in any numbers, combine for a descent upon the villages. In one year, 1896, nine convicts who had escaped from the Alexandrovsk prisons at various times joined forces in the Timovsk district and gave a great deal of trouble. They were pursued by strong parties of soldiers, but often turned to show fight, having become possessed of firearms. Eventually they were captured, the survivors of the gang ending as usual upon the gallows.

When they are Chinese — and in Manchuria, the Russians hunt them down and shoot as many as they can at sight — those wounded and taken alive are decapitated and their heads hung by the way-

side, but no real attempt has been made to rid Siberia and Saghalien of this great pest and danger.

Statistics are not helpful, as so few arrests are made, and so few crimes discovered. Garroting is the chief device of the footpad. With a short stick and a noose of twine, he approaches his victim from the rear, slips the cord over his head and strangles the man, woman or child, who is unable to utter a cry; then he strips from the body everything likely to lead to its identification, and decamps. If there is an accomplice, he blocks the stranger's advance or engages his attention at the correct moment. Nor is there perfect safety in numbers. "Whilst at Khabarovsk," says a recent traveller, "I paid a visit to one of the lone pioneers of Anglo-Saxondom in that far-off land. There, within a stone's throw of the governor-general's house, three citizens were attacked within five minutes of our passing. Their assailants got away, but all three of the merchants succumbed to their injuries. At Blagoveschensk, in broad daylight, between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, and quite close to the main hotel and high street, I heard a series of revolver shots, and turning, saw a man leisurely reloading his revolver. His victim, a woman in this case, never uttered a cry, merely fell. The street was almost deserted, and the people who heard and saw took very little notice, but with the aid of a passing soldier, we arrested that man, and in the rough and ready lock-up to which he was taken were electric lights

and telephone. In a few minutes the district superintendent was summoned, but we were scarcely thanked for our part, and we were told that our action was not Siberian, and that the affair was none of ours.

“From Cheliobinsk to Vladivostok crime is equally common. In the latter place, I was told that after each pay-day at the naval fitting yard men were missing and never returned. On one occasion thirty disappeared, and ordinarily eight or ten bodies are found within a few days, stripped of every shred of clothing, their tattooed marks gashed over and the features hacked so that they could not be recognised. Russians suffer more than the Chinese, and Russians are usually the aggressors. Policemen are too few and too wary. Unless the street be crowded, men may shout loud and long before any will venture to their assistance.”

The suburbs and villages in Siberia, says the same authority, suffer from the vagrant bands who raid settlements and houses, exacting all they dare and often not falling short of other crimes. They are the fugitives from justice, escaped criminals, the reckless and daring convicts who have eluded their prison guards. They have nothing but what they have stolen, a wooden staff and a short length of leather or twine. Whoever gets into their power has a short shrift and theirs is not longer if they are captured in the act or traced. For entering and robbing a church in Vladivostok, some were hanged,

for in Siberia the death penalty is not in abeyance as in Russia. In Siberia — and in Russia too — lynch law is common among the peaceable, industrious, well-to-do peasants as it is also among the half Russianised natives. One method of dealing with cattle thieves is to bend down two straight young birch trees, tie the hands of the robber to one and his feet to the other, then release the trees and hurry away.

Later records describe the extraordinary career of a convict, Nagorny by name, who is said to have escaped seven times from Saghalien, his last having been effected while he was chained to a wheelbarrow. This man had been guilty of more than fifty murders and several hundred robberies, many of these having been perpetrated in the disguise of a gendarme, when he entered the houses of his victims under the pretext of making an official search. He was tall, strongly built and had a ruffianly expression. When he was arrested, Nagorny pointed a loaded revolver at his custodian, but the lock of the weapon proved damaged and it was useless.

A hideous story is preserved in Saghalien of a tragic event that occurred in the summer of 1892, when a party of a hundred convicts were sent from Alexandrovsk to make a road through the *taiga* to Rikovsk. It was a terrible task; the road followed the course of the Boroni River, in a wide and swampy valley, rendered impassable by unexpected heavy rains, which cut the workmen off from their

base of supplies. Great numbers of the gang perished from starvation, dysentery and fevers. Three of them, maddened by their privations, escaped into the *taiga*, and when pursued, wandered further and further into the primeval forest. It was strongly suspected, but never proved, that one of the three was killed and eaten by his two comrades, for one of them when caught was found to be carrying a human bone in his pouch, but his mind was unhinged and he could give no coherent account of what happened. He was treated as a lunatic, and his insanity saved him from punishment, but he was ever afterward known as "Vasiliv the Cannibal." The other fugitive, Kalenik, was sentenced to ninety-nine strokes of the plet, which killed him.

Political exiles have been deported to Saghalien, but not in any great number. They were among the earliest convicts transported by sea, and it is worth noting that the Russian government in 1888 was anxious to make no distinction between them and the common criminals. Mr. Kennan prints a letter concerning some of them from M. Galkin Vrasski, the well-known chief of prison administration, directing that no difference should be made between them and the ordinary criminals. They were to be subjected to the same discipline, but to be kept under stricter surveillance, if anything, and were to be liable to more severe punishments inflicted on Saghalien and in Siberia. Two, indeed, were flogged at Alexandrovsk, after an unhappy

collision with the prison authorities caused by the neglect of one of them to raise his hat on meeting a subordinate official. Their sufferings were, of course, greater owing to the remoteness of their domicile and their savage surroundings. They were naturally more in touch with the civilised world at Tobolsk, Tomsk and Irkutsk, and were at a peculiar disadvantage on Saghalien, because of the dearth of educated people among the exiled population. They were in request for more cultured employment as schoolmasters, accountants or in scientific labours. As a rule, they bore their expatriation and the hardships of their daily life with equanimity, and were quiet and well-conducted. Many of them had been victims of Russian despotism and had suffered much in the Russian state prisons. One of them whom Mr. Hawes met on Saghalien was a lady who had at one time belonged to a secret society unknown to her husband. When Alexander II was assassinated she fled the country. On returning later to Russia, she was arrested on suspicion, but her identity could not be proved until her husband was tricked into recognising her when they were suddenly brought face to face. This lady was consigned to the fortress of Schüsselburg, and was so entirely lost sight of that her husband, presuming she was dead, married again. Ten years later he heard that she was alive and had been transported to Saghalien. Having somehow settled matters with his second wife, he followed his first to the other end of the world

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and was eventually allowed to settle with her at Vladivostok.

In spite of restrictions, hardships and almost intolerable conditions, the political exile has been a distinct aid and valuable factor in the settlement and development of Siberia, carrying with him ideals and standards and a degree of intelligence far in advance of the native Siberian settler and peasant. The infusion of such an element is all the more needed because of the low average of intelligence of the great mass of the convicts, many of whom become permanent residents of Siberia. Mr. Henry Norman has said of the prisoners in the prison of Irkutsk, as he found them: "Never has it been my lot, though I have visited prisons, civilised and uncivilised, in many parts of the world, to see human nature at such a low ebb. . . . From this point of view, Russian criminology has a task unknown in countries where civilisation has reached a higher average of development." It is the criminal exile who has been a bar to progress in Siberia, and with the cessation of the transportation of this class of convicts, the future is brighter for the great exile territory which is so rich in natural possibilities.

Siberia will no doubt become the granary of the world. Its millions of fertile acres must ere long develop its great food producing qualities. With its great stretches of prairie waiting for the plough, its huge forests and magnificent waters, "it is evident that the Siberia of convicts and prisoners is

passing away and the Siberia of the reaping machine, the gold drill, the timber yard, the booming, flourishing new town is awakening into new life."

The present condition of Russia is appalling. Centuries of autocratic rule, backed by barbarous methods, such as have been set forth at some length in the foregoing pages, have culminated now in a social upheaval that threatens the collapse of a vast empire. The stability of the government is wholly undermined; long continued, merciless repression has failed; resistance to constituted authority becomes daily more daring and embittered. The Czar and his bureaucracy are more and more fiercely and systematically assailed, despite the increased reprisals of despotic power and the temporary triumph of a reactionary policy.

Rulers, with their backs to the wall, plead these outrages are imperative in self-defence. The malcontents, ever increasing in numbers and violence, have openly determined to make government impossible and that terrorism by bomb-throwing and assassination is the only argument left. They will accept no compromise; they distrust all promises, and move steadily on to social revolution. "We cannot call our souls our own," said a working man in Moscow to an English writer; "we cannot discuss affairs of our country without risk of Siberia; we are taxed down to the last kopeck; we are blackmailed by every petty official; we have no freedom of the press; if anybody in authority does us wrong,

we have no redress . . . we hate the bomb-throwing as much as you do. But it is the only argument left to us." This is characteristic of the spirit animating the "great mass of lethargic ignorant Muscovites" goaded at last to action and gaining hourly in strength and recklessness. Meanwhile the government maintains the struggle. Its persistent answer is to refuse reforms until order is restored, and it still finds champions and supporters, especially in the so-called "Black Hundred," a powerful reactionary organisation based upon an unofficial union of the Russian people.

An examination of any of the recent budgets for yearly expenses of this huge empire will show a most astonishing percentage appropriated to the maintenance of order, — the upkeep of the police and censorship of the press, — and will furnish to the intelligent observer a reason for present conditions, as well as a reason for admiring the fidelity of the educated members of the lower classes to their ideal of liberty.

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